Adelaide Festival and Fringe

Murray Bramwell's Adelaide Festival, Adelaide Fringe and WOMADelaide reviews.

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1980s Reviews

Ravelling up the Fringe

Published: 1985-06-21 *Adelaide Fringe*

The Fringe Festival of Cabaret in Adelaide continues the reputation of Fringe festivals which have provided many of the sleepers, surprises and outright hits of the Adelaide Festival season.

Since the Festival itself is having a bye this year the Fringe has been at centre stage in the Living Arts Centre which has turns at being the empty hulk of Fowler's "Lion" factory and the venue for some of the liveliest cabaret comedy and music ever seen in Adelaide.

The program has offered nearly 30 acts from all around the country and for two weeks has attracted enthusiastic houses and some impressive sponsorship as well as forging productive links with the Adelaide Festival Centre.

Chris Willems' *Son of Romeo* is a droll time-lapse mime show unfolding the edited highlights of the tragedy of R and J. The comedy really broadens with its depiction of Paris as an upper class twit and the appearance of a barking dog during Romeo's secret tryst in the garden.

In contrast, Willems allows himself some eloquent hand mime and while Romeo dies by poison, hara-kiri, gunshot wounds and finally hanging, the death of Juliet is a fragile and balletic performance.

The music by Willems and Stuart Day deserved special mention.

Vitalstatistix provided a *Fabulous Apron* fashion parade. As compere, Effie le Petit Mange from the House of Hoxton, Margaret Fischer nicely lampoons the tyrannies of the catwalk and kitchen while models, Roxxy Bridges and Ollie Black parade a succession of preposterous garments in an uneven but amiably zany show.

Tick Where Applicable, a hit from last year's Fringe, were back like a very manic Two Stooges as they choke on tennis balls, mutilate their ears with rubberbands and deliver a hectic routine of good and very bad jokes. These Tics are more like convulsions but they provide a good night's brain damage.

Evelyn Krape was back in town with her particular patent on hilarity as she whizzes from her demure mode into frantic slapstick.

And frantic is certainly the word for Sydney's Funny Stories. These five comics blend every tasteless and excessive kind of satire, slapstick and vaudeville into an hilarious set which includes those unrivalled spivs, The Portnoy Brothers and Tombstone, a chainsmoker non-chalantly drooling blood.

The humour is often downright sinister but the pace and the interplay with the audience ensures that Funny Stories guide us through their nightmares to at least a measure of safety at the end.

The Fringe Festival of Cabaret has also featured established acts like The Phones, Los Trios Ringbarkus, who have extended their season in the Playhouse, and The Flying Pickets, from the UK, who brilliantly reminded us that political theatre does not have to be like Sunday School.

Fringe co-ordinator, Rosemary Miller, is seeking assurance that the Living Arts Centre will continue to be available for next year's Festival. With a program of this calibre and popularity she has a compelling case to offer.

The National Times, June 21, 1985, p.32.

Sisters

Published: 1986-03-01 *Adelaide Festival · Music*

Kate and Anna McGarrigle Festival Theatre

Kate and Anna McGarrigle first gained attention as songwriters in the early Seventies when Maria Muldaur recorded Kate's "The Work Song", and Linda Ronstadt used-Anna's "Heart like a Wheel" as the title song for her 1974 album.

The McGarrigles began recording their own material in 1975, rapidly gaining attention for their fetchingly artless vocals and whimsical arrangements. On this tour, eleven years later, the McGarrigles are still being whimsical and fetchingly artless and it mostly works.

Their Sunday night concert in the Festival Theatre was late starting due to something called technical problems but when the band filed on stage there was still a hum coming out of the right speaker bank loud enough to entice humpback whales into shallow waters. It is simply not good enough to have poor sound systems at venues like the Festival Theatre and it certainly doesn't help a group like the McGarrigles to deliver their delicate brand of country/ pop/blues/cajun/music hall/ballad to the faithful.

The band opened with "Dancer with Bruised Knees" featuring some fine violin work from Joel Zifkin and giving us a chance 'to take a look at the performers. For one thing there was an extra McGarrigle - three for the price of two. Jane, listed as tour manager, seems to be the group minder, providing soothing jokes when things get ragged and adding a strong third' voice to the occasionally fragile voices of the others.

Her presence anchored the performance which was just as well because Kate's amateur hour stage manner was threatening to become somewhat arch. "We don't introduce our songs," she, said a shade too tartly, "because we already know them." Things began to settle down with a couple of songs from their early albums - "First Born" and "NaCl" and the McGarrigles stopped rolling their eyes and staring at microphones as if they'd never seen anything like them on their maple syrup farms in Quebec. By the time they got to "Naufragee du Tendre" (Shipwrecked) the band was hitting its straps as well. The rhythm section with Gerry Conway on drums and Pat Donaldson on bass have been associated with the McGarrigles since their second album but their presence is much more evident these days. Former members of Fotheringay - part of the Fairport Convention group of companies - they bring those Fairport signatures, chunky drumming and resonant striding bass lines, to the overall sound.

The McGarrigles played a delightful range of songs including the winsome "Sun, Son (Shining on the Water)" with some spacious synthesiser fills from Anna. They also sang Cajun songs, traditional ballads, songs about airline pilots, oil riggers serenading teenage runaways and songs like "Love is" - "Love is a twelve bar blues / Love is blue suede shoes / Love is a mind confused" which as with so many McGarrigle compositions has a lyric which is too cute for daylight but sung with sparkingly clear country vocals and Sankey hymn. piano chords garnished with Jorn Reissner's nicely understated guitar lines, is all too appealing to resist.

After interval the speakers were still humming but so was the band. They began with a splendid version of Loudon Wainwright's "Swimming Song" complete with banjo, mandolin and accordion accompaniment which they followed with some new songs which will have McGarrigle fans rampaging to their sixth album whenever it appears.

By the time they got to "Heart like a Wheel" all three vocals had blended exquisitely. After a spirited version of "Love Over and Over" and an encore by the three sisters singing "Mendo-cino" with Kate's lead vocal combining beautifully with the piano, no one needed convincing that the McGarrigles can make their music sound sweet - even if they can hardly be called mcgarrulous with a crowd of folks in front of them.

"Sisters" *The Adelaide Review*, March, 1986, p.9.

Billie Rocks

Published: 1986-03-01 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Rockaby By Samuel Beckett Billie Whitelaw Union Theatre

"This," Billie Whitelaw announced pointing to the bright blue cover of her script folder, "is the most cheerful thing you'll see all evening." Maybe it was meant to be disarming to the audience but it momentarily short-circuited the possibilities of the evening by reinforcing Beckett's popular reputation, or rather his notoriety, as a joyless nihilist who wrote those now rather old hat plays about loitering tramps and people in rubbish bins.

The remarkable fact is that Beckett's spare, almost Wittgensteinian writing can be wryly humorous and, despite an abiding sense of despair, it never fails to acknowledge that we poor, forked unaccommodated things hang on by our toenails regardless of how hopeless we may think it all is.

Billie Whitelaw is no newcomer to Beckett's work. She appeared in the first production of *Play* in 1964 and worked with the author at the Royal Court in London. Beckett once said that just as he heard Patrick Magee's voice in his mind's ear when he wrote a part for a man, so he heard Billie Whitelaw's as the woman's voice - particularly for the woman's part in *Not I* first performed in New York by Jessica Tandy and then again in London in 1973 when Whitelaw herself played under Beckett's direction which was so exacting and demanding that it nearly drove her to distraction. Although, finally, Beckett was totally satisfied with Whitelaw's performance, such stories remind us how fastidiously considered his work is, and how special it is to see such a distinguished interpreter as this.

The evening began uncertainly with Whitelaw reading a short prose piece entitled *Enough*. As she stood chatting self consciously at the lectern she disconcertingly noted that Beckett disliked his prose being read aloud. Maybe it was knowing that old Sam was disapproving but I couldn't help thinking that Whitelaw was unequal to the piece – over-animated and rather hurried, she didn't give it time to seep into our consciousness as Beckett needs to do. *Enough* is a woman's memoir of her husband, unironically admiring, bearing witness to a kind of contentment in his dominance:

"We lived on flowers. So much for sustenance … We were on the whole calm. More and more. All was. This notion of calm comes from him. Without him I would not have had it. Now I'll wipe out everything but the flowers. No more rain. No more mounds. Nothing but the two of us dragging through the flowers. Enough my old breasts feel his hand."

The second piece *Footfalls* (1975) is a play also about habitual relationship - this time between a woman in her forties, May, also referred to as Amy, and her ailing mother in her nineties. May traipses the stage dishevelled, like a hag designed by Arthur Rackham - she wears a flowing dress all in rags like long strips of tree bark. Her mother listens in the dark, her morphine wearing off, calling May to heel - "seven, eight, nine, wheel" – and recalling:

"One night, while still little more than a child, she called her mother and said, Mother, this is not enough … The mother: what do you mean, May, not enough, what can you possibly mean, May not enough? May: I mean, Mother, that I must hear the feet, however faint' they fall. The Mother: The motion alone is not enough? May: No, Mother, the motion alone is not enough, I must hear the feet, however faint they fall."

As Whitelaw paces the floor we listen as her feet scuff and return their worn path like those of a creature demented by insufficient territory. She is the - captive life of her withered mother who asks: "Will you never have done revolving it all? It … it all … in your poor mind?"

Rockaby, written by Beckett in 1975 is a splendid instance of the poetic richness and infinite variation in his work. It is as pure as rain drops, so deceptively simple we are lulled by it. Whitelaw rocks in her chair while her voice is heard from upstage in rhythm with her movement. Whitelaw's recorded voice enunciates the lines with mantric clarity - "till in the end /the day came / in the end came /when she said I to herself I /whom else / time she stopped/ time she stopped". But the crone with heavy black wrinkles seated in the chair cries out "More". Time she stopped says the voice, more cries the woman.

Billie Whitelaw's performance is beautifully expressive of cantankerous, wistful, imperturbable senescence: "let down the blind and down / right down/ into the old rocker / and rocked / rocked / saying to herself / no /done with that."

Rocky Greenberg who restaged these pieces based on original direction by the late Alan Schneider, also designed the lighting which has been creditably created by stage manager Chris Bain and Kym Newell who also ensure that the taped voices are refreshingly free of the aural goo to which we have become dismally accustomed whenever tapes are used on stage.

The technical precision of Whitelaw's performance and the high production values generally, make Rockaby a rare theatrical experience. As the chair rocks between life and nothingness - "rock her off / stop her eyes / fuck life /stop her eyes / rock her off / rock her off" we watch her expire.

But the written text is ambiguous. Beckett, honoured on his 80th birthday would surely be calling more, being far from off his rocker himself and knowing, as he does, that although we suffer, we nevertheless persist.

"Billie Rocks" *The Adelaide Review*, March 1986, p.11.

Audacity carries the day

Published: 1986-03-07 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Adelaide's State Theatre Company has premiered Stephen Sewell's *Dreams in an Empty City*, directed by Neil Armfield, as its Festival offering in the Playhouse.

Ever since State's and Armfield's production of Sewell's earlier play, *The Blind Giant is Dancing*, astonished admiring audiences in 1983 there has been great anticipation of this new work.

Stephen Sewell's dramatic writing is extraordinary both in its scope, which is almost hubristically epic, and in the appalling risks he takes with his dialogue. He writes about matters of life and death, the corruption of institutions, the socialist transformation of society and the ravages of the family, and his characters talk as gauchely and artlessly as we ourselves do in the crises and confrontations that determine what we are.

Dreams in an Empty City is about a deathly power struggle between Wilson and Wiesland, two nasty captains of commerce, aided by American merchant bankers, who are themselves sinking into the shark-infested custard of deregulation. As a fly to these wanton boys comes Chris O'Brien, a defrocked priest whose brother, a builder in cahoots with Wiesland, has made him a phantom director of a shonky company which is now under investigation.

Dreams owes much to sleuth writers like Chandler and the detailed emotional encounters of soap opera. In fact, Sewell uses these genres to engage us for virtually a TV mini-series at the theatre.

It is engrossing stuff in a mixture of modes loaded with detail about currency transactions, broadsides at the revisionism of the Labor Government and at business lunches and has an almost expressionist use of satire.

But as always with Sewell such accounts do not sufficiently describe what he is doing. We have also O' Brien, acting in a mediocre play about the martyrdom of a priest in Central America, asking, "Is Romerez Christ or not? Because if he is the play's bullshit, and if he's not, it doesn't make any sense."

Sewell, with breathtaking temerity and on the very brink of parody, has built his own play on the Passion of Chris O'Brien, the secular Christ - agonized, betrayed, tempted by the world and finally martyred to deliver us from futility and false gods.

Armfield has taken this play in all its lumpy immensity and staged it with the kind of assurance that has made him one of the very best directors in this country.

As Wilson, John Gaden, State's artistic director, leads from the front and gives an eerie performance - urbane, mephistophlean and with the compression of a Vice figure in a morality play.

Dreams in an Empty City is an audacious play. Sewell writes with courage and great heart and asks us plainly what our lives are worth. It's a fair question and this remarkable production reminds us that it is one of the tasks of theatre to ask it.

Murray Bramwell

The National Times, March 7, 1986, p.33.

First day at school

Published: 1986-03-21 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Magpie Theatre Company's production of David Holman's new play The Small Poppies has opened at Theatre 62 in Adelaide.

Directed by Geoffrey Rush with music composed by Moya Henderson and recorded for performance by the Australian String Quartet, The Small Poppies is about three little tackers on their first day at school.

Typically of David Holman's work -and this is his 70th play - The Small Poppies makes its intentions very clear. It is for five-year-olds and all who want to recall that large step into humankind when we go to Big School.

The Magpie Company spent weeks in primary schools observing new entrants in classes and talking with them, their teachers and parents and from a profusion of incidents and anecdotes the play has been fashioned.

The play focuses on three children - Theo, the son of a Greek car worker, Clint, an Australian kid who lives with his mother, and Lep, a Kampuchean orphan recently arrived from a refugee camp in Thailand.

In The Small Poppies, children and parents must adjust to the irrevocable processes of social induction which can be forbidding and humiliating. But, as always, Holman's plays forthrightly offer resolutions, never easy ones or complete ones, but gladsome nevertheless.

Theo's father comes to school to remove his son because there are too many Asians about. Instead he finds himself assisting with a Greek lesson and later reassuring Lep as she waits anxiously for her sister to collect her.

During show-and-tell in the classroom kids show off their latest Transforma toys, while Lep takes from a paper shopping bag a straw hat, a dress and a pair of sandals which she spreads out on the floor as the remaining precious links with her dead mother.

These incidents have the force of real events but they have been shaped and integrated with Holman's considerable wit and skill.

Geoffrey Rush has directed firmly and subdued any tendency towards an easy cuteness with the audience. Colin Mitchell's set in strong greens, yellows and reds has all the brightness of a box of Smarties.

There are cubby holes concealed for jokers in daggy hats to spring out of with rapid fire riddles and bad jokes that little kids love- because they taught them to the actors in the first place.

The colourful backdrops - reminiscent of Ken Done - have holes cut for heads and hands allowing the actors immediate visual gags before the audience is drawn into the more complex demands of the story.

The performances are some of the most assured that the Magpies have given. Melanie Salomon shows both the goodwill and perplexity of a teacher dealing with these serious little poppies.

Ev Katahanas gives a touching, economical dignity to the character of Lep and Richard Margetson is deft as Shane Miller, the class bruiser, and carries some of the play's most delicate moments as Theo's father.

Stephen Rae as Clint is outstanding. It is his most detailed and unselfconscious work to date and it contributes substantially to the success of the play.

The National Times, March 21, 1986, p.35.

Anderson shows the essence of pop amid hi-tech legerdemain

Published: 1986-03-28 *Adelaide Festival · Music*

Very few performance artists have made the leap to pop with such spectacular success as Laurie Anderson whose concert in Adelaide's Festival Theatre opened her Australian tour and coincides with the release of her newest album, *Home of the Brave*.

All of the paradoxes of Anderson's achievements are evident in her opening monologue, *Progress*. The eclectic, hi -tech relativism of her work exactly mirrors the processes she rails against as heartless progress. Anderson's is a triumph of style - it is the very essence of pop, finding the most appealing musical and aural effects to suggest meanings which never quite compute.

So the overall effect of her show is curiously inert, like a live video clip- a form now notorious for its mischievous parataxis. Anderson's work is technological legerdemain and because it uniquely combines a pop concert with the highest production values of theatre, the result is compelling for audiences.

The show consists of tapes and pre-programmed material- that haunting, melancholic, mantric sound that is Anderson's signature - overlaid by vocals, keyboards and other treated sounds produced by Anderson beating parts of her body, thrumming on microphone stands and even, it seems, the boards of the stage itself.

As she literally mics her own body, Anderson becomes an electronic hand· maiden, vulnerable and spikily elvish as the gigantic screen behind her projects animations, action replays and visual cliches - all the unprocessed data that simultaneously means more and less than it should.

The best moments are familiar pieces such as the memorable *Big Science*. *Gravity's Angel* and the witty anti-love song, *Sweaters*, and new ones such as *Baby Doll* with splendid back-up vocals from Phillip Ballou and Bennie Diggs.

So much of Anderson's appeal is in the way she co-opts the most familiar American pop - it is like a monologue from the Shangri La's run through a vocoder - and her use of musicians such as Peter Gabriel nicely located her concern for musical accessibility.

This is the strength of Anderson's work and why, finally, her work is so unobjectionable. She does not just comment on pop, she is pop. When we see footage of her dancing with William Burroughs, it is her last tango with the avant garde.

The staging of Anderson's show is a tribute to the performer and lighting designer, Patricia Connors, and to projectionist James Hobberman. There are no glitches, no glaring into the foldback, no rock-and-roll tantrums.

Instead, Anderson and keyboard player, David LeBolt close the show with *O Superman* - still her most perfect composition with its chilling augury of peril - and the credits roll on the screen like a movie. There is, of course no encore. The price of this impeccable performance is that the product is hermetically sealed - like airline food in heaven.

Murray Bramwell

The National Times, March 28, 1986, p.33.

Fringe Things

Published: 1986-04-01 *Adelaide Fringe*

The Adelaide Festival Fringe really exceeded itself this year. More than 240 events were programmed in nooks and crannies all over Adelaide in a remarkable showcase of performing, visual and community arts. Much of the action was at the Living Arts Centre, the former Fowler's Lion factory in Morphett Street which despite some well-meaning CEP sprucing still looked like a particoloured abattoir. However, regardless of the spartan venues and the inevitable difficulties of determining which part of the catacombs was which, the Fringe offered a programme which though spotty, was full of pleasant surprises.

Unfortunately, the business of finding the best truffles before they're over and done with is nearly a full time job and those of us in the comps brigade were usually cutting a swathe through the main Festival as well.

Nevertheless, articles like this one at least give reviewers a final chance to pay some belated credit to events and performances of particular merit even if it does less than nothing to· tickle the box office receipts. With so many acts scheduled it is inevitable that a great deal of talent will be overlooked. Even punters with plenty of cash have only got so much time and energy to spend soaking up culture before they start to crave the chance of staying home to re-organise the spice jars or watch the most stupefying television programmes they can find.

And for those short of cash the cost of shows plus a few beers made more than a night or two at the Fringe prohibitive. The time has probably come to winnow the number of events at least enough to give all the participants a chance to be seen and maybe earn a bob or two as well. More double bills and concessions for multiple bookings would help but, recognising what a nightmare operating the Fringe box office must be, one is tentative about making suggestions that could make things even more byzantine than they are at present.

1986 saw the return of Fringe favourites from previous festivals and last year's highly successful Festival of Fringe cabaret, as well as new groups from all around Australia and New Zealand. Productions, ranged from The One Extra Company's The Shrew, a disquieting retelling of Shakespeare's Taming of the Shrew which director Kai Tai Chan located in sixteenth century Chinese society using footbinding as a central motif of gender tyranny. For many this lavish, ambitious study of The Shrew as foots bind was the Fringe highpoint.

Dramadillo, a trio from Auckland, also provided engaging theatre with their nimble narrative of *The Odyssey*. Actors Nick Blake and Juliet Monaghan and musical accompanist Arthur Ranford presented-the various episodes of Homer's best seller with economy and wit, never lapsing into parody and achieving a clarity and seriousness which pleased wide audiences.

The Brisbane based dance group Zip - four iron men and their sixteen ironing boards gave a highly imaginative and unfussy performance of their Ironing Board Dance No. 9 which very readily clattered, fluttered and draped itself into the long term memory. We look forward to Zip returning - they have a neatness and intelligence in their work that promises much. The Fringe Cabaret remains the main crowd pleaser and the hordes gathered for Wendy Harmer and Maryanne Fahey's *Faking It* for some terrific comedy of manners and bad manners, and for the much vaunted Castanets whose Archie and Jugband stage routines, though hyperactive, seemed remote and rather forced. I can't really say that the Castanets clicked for me.

The Doug Anthony All Stars, on the other hand, moved like heat-seeking missiles to their targets with heartless parodies of songs popularised by Del Shannon, Nancy Sinatra and God help him, Lionel Ritchie. This unsavoury little Canberra group looks like biblebelt dairy farmers' sons or those prefects who are expelled from boarding school that no-one wants to talk about. The Doug Anthonys stalked audiences like psychopaths at a bus stop and if you were sitting far enough away you loved them.

As offal through the hourglass so were the nights of Let The Blood Run Free presenting their hilarious form of unstanched hospital drama for the 12.30 graveyard shift. Laughter may be the best medicine but this show from Melbourne's Last Laugh edged with brilliantly savage satire and performed with manic glee was about as comforting as an epidural with an ice pick.

Other comedy surprises included the talented and very offbeat Sydney film-makers' Even Orchestra and Sunday Comics including Warwick Irwin as Spanner Portnoy, the fundamentally good bloke and the brilliant Paul Livingstone: as Flacco d'Paenus, 20th century everyperson with angst in his pants and curdled nostalgia in his heart. Sydney's Funny Stories continued to glister with their new show *Gold*. If this weird slapstick is fools' gold it's certainly up to the standard of the other stuff.

Adelaide's Black Diamond Comer reconvened as an a capella group, drew warm audiences with a set ranging from satiric parody to haunting South American revolutionary songs and Italian ballads. Meanwhile Pat Wilson, Christopher Prank and Adrian Barnes packed them in at Tooley's with Been There, Sung That.

There are always shows you regret missing especially when there are so many time clashes. You must make arbitary decisions. I wish I'd seen Howard Slowly - he was certainly greatly admired by fellow comedians if not by audiences and reviewers and I'm sorry to have missed Vitalstatistix' *Weighing It Up* and Handspan's *Smalls*. But then maybe that's the appeal of the Fringe as well as its frustration - there's so much to over-indulge in yet you find it's out of reach.

"Fringe Things" *The Adelaide Review,* No.25, April, 1986. p.9.

Brook Review

Published: 1988-02-01 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

The Shifting Point: Theatre, Film, Opera 1946-1987 By Peter Brook Harper and Row

Peter Brook – A Theatrical Casebook Compiled by David Williams Methuen

Peter Brook is not only one of the great innovators of Post-war Western theatre he is also one of its most lucid explainers. His first book, *The Empty Space*, published twenty years ago, reads as freshly and sharply today as it did when Brook first delivered the four Granada Northern lectures on which the book is based. His discussion of the four forms of theatre -the Holy, the Rough, the Immediate and the Deadly - is as deft as a scalpel. In fact he uses a medical analogy himself:

"If we talk of deadly (theatre) let us note that the difference between life and death, so crystal clear in man, is somewhat veiled in other fields. A doctor can tell at once between the trace of life and the useless bag of bones that life has left; but we are less practised in observing how an idea, an attitude or a form can pass from the lively to the moribund."

It is Brook's gift to know what the centres of energy in theatre are, such that he can preserve and discard from the classical and experimental repertoires equally. His latest book, with its title *The Shifting Point*, emphasises in the Preface Brook's mercurial approach.

"For a point of view to be of any use at all, one must commit oneself totally to it, one must defend it to the very death. Yet at the same time there is an inner voice that murmurs: 'Don't take it too seriously. Hold on tightly, let go lightly."

Elsewhere in the book, Brook reiterates the idea - "I remember a trip to Dublin where I had heard of an Irish philosopher who was very fashionable in university circles. I had not read the book he had written, and I hadn't even met the man, but I remember a phrase of his, quoted by someone in a bar, which struck me at once; it was the theory of the 'shifting viewpoint'. It didn't mean a fickle point of view, but the exploration as made in certain types of X-rays, where changing perspectives give an illusion of density. I still remember today the impression it made on me."

Brook's writings reveal a systematic search for the essentials of theatre-in direction, acting, design, performance and in its relation to an audience. He declares himself opposed to the techniques "in which (on) the first day the director gives a speech on what the play's about and how he's (sic) going to approach it. I used to do that years ago and eventually I found that that's a rotten way of starting . . . When I begin to work on a play I start with a deep formless hunch which is like a smell, a colour, a shadow."

"The director needs only one conception - which he must find in his life, not in art - which comes from asking himself what an act of theatre is doing in the world, why it is there."

The Shifting Point charts Peter Brook's disengagement from English theatre where he began in 1946. He admits himself that he arrogantly chose the theatre when he became impatient with the thought that it might take him ten years in films before he'd get a chance to direct. Instead, Brook took to Shakespeare with passion and imagination. He describes Shakespeare as a piece of coal.

"History is a way of looking at things but not one that interests me very much. I'm interested in the present. Shakespeare doesn't belong to the past. If his material is valid it is valid now. It's like coal. One knows the whole process of the primeval forest and one can trace the history of coal; but the meaningfulness of a piece of coal to us starts and finishes with it in combustion, giving out the light and heat that we want. And that to me is Shakespeare."

In a section entitled *People on the Way*, Brook writes of those who have shed light on his work. The aestheticist Gordon Craig, eccentric son of Ellen Terry and cousin of Gielgud, designing stage miniatures in a shabby pension in the South of France, Julian Beck of New York's Living Theatre, Samuel Beckett and Marcel Ayme, the French writer who prompted Brook to observe: "In France one can be more honest, more true to life than in England. Here we are all caught up in a conspiracy to hide the truth from ourselves in a cloud of hopefulness and charm."

Instead, Brook found direction and provocation from Artaud, Grotowski, Peter Weiss, author of *Marat/Sade* - and the so-called Theatre of Cruelty. As Brook explains, "Artaud used the word cruelty not to invoke sadism but to call us toward a theatre more rigorous, or even, if we could follow him that far, pitiless to us all."

Inevitably Brook was becoming an internationalist, perceiving the world as a can opener as he put it. In 1970 he moved to Paris to found his International Centre for Theatre Research. Actors came from all over to join. "Our first principle, Brook recalls, was to make culture, in the sense of culture that turns milk into yoghurt. We aimed to create a nucleus of actors who could later bring ferment to any wider group with whom they worked."

Brook's approach, as always, was rigorous technically, psychologically, linguistically. The results were *Orghast*, written in collaboration with the poet Ted Hughes, and *The Conference of the Birds*, adapted from the work of the Sufi poet Attar. The CIRT and Brook went on journeys both metaphorical and actual, travelling all over the African continent performing, observing and learning.

Then the Centre of Theatre Research became a Centre of Creation in the Bouffes du Nord theatre in Paris, evolving productions of *Timons of Athens* and *The Ik*, based on anthropologist Colin Turnbull's account of an African tribe driven to chaos and cruelty by starvation. In "An Aborigine I Presume" reprinted from the *Sunday Times*, Brook recalls a performance at Ernabella near Alice Springs. "I tell them the story of The Ik and realise that in telling them about an African tribe brutally deprived of its land I am telling them their own story as well."

The Shifting Point is a series of brilliant shards. The writing, plain, concise, is compulsively readable. Brook writes about his opera productions with designer Rolf Gerard and conductor Pierre Monteux and his films from *Marat/Sade* through to *Meetings with Remarkable Men.* The essay on *Lord of the Flies* is particularly engaging: "My experience showed me that the only falsification in Golding's fable is the length of time the descent to savagery takes. His action takes about three months. I believe if the cork of continued adult presence were removed from the bottle, the complete catastrophe could occur within a long weekend."

And with the Festival performance at Anstey's Hill quarry only a stone's throw away it is time to mention *The Mahabharata*. Brook describes his introduction to this massive narrative from the Sanskrit scholar Philippe Lavastine. Brook and collaborator Jean-Claude Carriere then travelled extensively in India to prepare for the project.

In his splendidly detailed Casebook on Brook, David Williams has gathered reviews, interviews and articles on, and by, Brook spanning his work from 1962 to the present (including *The Mahabharata*.) In an interview Brook describes it as the culmination of a series of experiments that he has made and, like all experiments, a way of returning to the source. It's that shifting point again.

Williams' *Casebook* and *The Shifting Point* combine well to remind us of the breadth, integrity and intellectual clarity of Peter Brook's Theatre. They also make us impatient for the arrival this month of his most recent major work.

"Brook Review", The Adelaide Review, No.47, February, 1988, pp. 25-6.

Maximus

Published: 1988-03-01 *Adelaide Festival · Comedy*

Circus Oz Rymill Park

Circus Oz were always more fun than a bucket of frogs and their Tenth Anniversary World Tour performances at the Festival must be the best yet.

They have an effortless mix of physical skill, adroit comedy, musical flair and sheer good nature. Tim Coldwell, a founding member of the company, is a genial sight in his baggy suit and size 13 sneakers and straight away the show establishes an · easy rapport with the audience.

A Bicentennial bush colonial opera is offered by a thirteen foot soprano while a work experience girl guide gets in the way. Then after a rapid rearrangement of weaponry other players take up guitars, cellos, saxophones, percussion and Lord knows what else as the first of the high wire acts begins.

With my programme pulled over my face I gleaned what sounded like high-walker Michael Ling doing some nimble work while clowning Coldwell pretended to be stuck half way. Just as well we had been taught early in the evening to do the Gasp of Admiration and Terror.

Circus Oz has two directors - founder Robin Laurie and guest director Emil Work -late of the celebrated People Show and the RSC's *Kiss Me Kate*. Walk's stylish brand of visual comedy is pleasingly evident in the latest show. A deadpan collection of lawnbowlers come out twittering and chatting. As they begin the head they gradually start forming human pyramids which end up with a four-tiered miracle amidst surreal comedy.

The highpole work, learned from Chinese acrobats from Nanjing, is a great display of agility and timing as performers snap their limbs around the pole, climbing and sliding with what can only be called the greatest of ease.

The second half opens with a fire-eating act all set to go. Paraffin everywhere, Happy the circus pyromaniac, assisted by the girl guide in contention for her arsonist's badge, is just about to light the touchpaper of Anni Davey's tutu when the Bicentennial Inspector Smith (Matthew Hughes) turns a fire extinguisher on the whole thing and begins an astonishingly adept trampoline act. Circus Oz wear their skills lightly but they have become highly proficient.

Tim Coldwell as a film noir shamus, with fedora and fag, hangs vertically from the roof thirty feet up. The skit is full of droll moments and upside-down jokes. "I walk out of a lonely efac," he intones closing the cafe door. It's a clever idea, stylishly performed. Then aerialist Theresa Blake did some solo rope work while the Oz orchestra played some of Matthew Fargher's hybrid music. Under red and blue spots (with mesmeric didgeridoo Riffs) Blake swung like a top on the rope. What I managed to see from between my fingers was appallingly skillful.

Circus Oz give a great show -exuberant, hilarious and theatrically confident. The pace never slackens and the closeness to the audience is a delight. This is accessible, committed entertainment proving that you can be popular and still make the customers think.

"Maximus" *The Adelaide Review*, March, 1988. nd.

Day for Night

Published: 1988-03-01 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

The Mahabharata Adapted by Jean-Claude Carriere Directed by Peter Brook Anstey's Hill Quarry

The Mahabharata is a colossal work. Written in Sanskrit, the first versions date back 400 hundred years BC. Then, for nearly eight centuries this epic poem grew to more than one hundred thousand stanzas. Fifteen times longer than The Bible, it is like the Old and New Testaments, all of Homer and thirty years of Mandrake and the Phantom all rolled into one.

Peter Brook and playwright Jean-Claude Carriere first heard stories from The Epic, as *The Mahabharata* is simply known, when they met Sanskrit scholar Philippe Lavastine in Paris in 1975. Carriere, a screen writer (*Belle de Jour*, *The Tin Drum*, *The Return of Martin Guerre* and, most recently, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*) began work on a performing text for Peter Brook's Centre International de Creations Theatrales (CICT) in 1976. He and Brook travelled in lndia and Carriere continued to work on the play through final drafts and rehearsals from 1982 to its first performance at the Avignon Festival in 1985.

Returning to the Anstey's Hill Quarry, where they presented *Ubu, The Ik* and the sublime *Conference of the Birds* for the 1980 Adelaide Festival, Peter Brook's CICT production of *The Mahabharata* is the leviathan of the 1988 Festival.

The sheer scale of the work and the remarkable abilities of Brook and his company make this production historic but it cannot be said to be an unqualified success. *The Mahabharata* has been described as a culmination of Brook's work but it suggests rather a repetition and coarsening of his earlier achievements.

There can be no disputing the accomplishment of the first section, *The Game of Dice*, however. Vyasa, the epic poet begins to relate the history of his people to a young boy while Ganesha, the elephant man, acts as scribe. The comedy is shrewd and fresh and the ironies of the narrative are disarming. At the beginning of the play when the character Bhishma takes a vow of chastity Ganesha exclaims - "the poetical history of mankind is already over. I'll collect my bits and pieces and be off." When the problem is solved by Vyasa, the poet, fathering the princess' child, Ganesha is aghast at such authorial intrusion - "speaking as the scribe, I find this totally unacceptable!" he splutters.

Such narrative quirks enliven the work and deconstruct the action, opening up a greater richness of perspective and interpretation.

There is a similar complexity in the acting. These earthy tales of courtship and conception have a Chaucerian vitality and the themes of destiny and danger are presented with a sort of yogic slapstick. The story of Pandu the pale, who kills a gazelle while she is coupled with her mate, is told with animistic charm, at once naive and ceremonial. This is when the invisible is made visible - what Brook himself calls holy theatre.

The Game of Dice is full of portents. Pandu's descendents (conceived with more than a little help from demigods) begin to clash with the ferocious Kauravas - all one hundred of them born as a hard ball from their mother Ghandhari and then incubated in-vitro in a hundred pitchers. The birth of Duryodhana unfurling from a flowing red drapery is one of many vivid images from Part 1.

All the principals are introduced - including Orona, master of arms and mentor of the archer, Arjuna, and Kama, son of the sun and unknown brother of the Pandavas.

The stirrings of war are indicated. Vows are made, pacts are formed and deals with deities have strings attached. The developing stuggle for power reaches a compulsive climax when Yudishsthira, eldest of the Pandavas, loses his shirt- and everyone else's - In a game of dice. This makes way for the events in Part 11, The Exile in the Forest and the apocalyptic karma of the final part, *The War*.

As with previous Brook productions the use of the quarry site is no mere theatrical whim. Designer Chloe Obolensky's bold red and green draperies and stylised screens and battlements look extraordinary against the stark rock-face and the eucalypts, while Jean Kalman's powerful grid bathes the play's lyric moments in honeyed light and defers to the clear night sky for the darker actions in the drama.

The music, blending Turkish, Japanese and lndian themes, is performed by five musicians on a variety of percussion, reed and wind instruments - including didgeridoo and the distinctive south lndian oboe, the nagaswaram, which also summoned the audience from their patient queueing at the portaloos after the all-too-brief intervals.

Much of the acting is truly remarkable. Bruce Myers' droll Ganesha and faintly sinister Krishna, Tapa Sudana 's whimsical Pandu and Siva, Yoshi Oida's memorable Orona, Marnadou Dioume's imposing Bhima and the intricate detail in Sotigui Kouyate's Bhishma, come immediately to mind. But Miriam Goldschmidt as Kunti, Mireille Maalouf as Gandhari, Mallika Sarabhai as Draupadi and Ryszard Cieslak as Dhritarashtra are also equally impressive. Nolan Hemmings' Abhimanyu is a disappointment and in the latter sections Jeffery Kissoon's Kama and Andrzej Seweryn's Yudhishthira start to sink in rhetoric.

Which is also to say the latter half of the play is burdened with a leaden narrative which is in disappointing contrast to the lambent enchantment of Part 1. It is not just the audience which is fatigued by the time the battles begin. There is less invention to staging and more bombast in the acting so that it is hard to sustain enthusiasm when some of the warriors finally face their nemesis.

Having fashioned such a rich patterning of stories in the first half of the play (although there are lapses into rather obvious comedy in Part 11) Brook and Carriere then loosen their narrative grip in Part 111 such that the poet Vyasa (played engagingly by Robert Langdon Lloyd) is used less decisively and, because of the doubling as Krishna, Myers' Ganesha is absent altogether. Although much is made of parallels between the play's secret weapons of total destruction and nuclear warfare in our own time, the martial scenes in Brook's saga come perilously close to those of an interminable gladiator movie.

It is traditional for *The Mahabharata* to be performed throughout the night but, unlike Balinese or southern lndian audiences who can come and go, eat, sleep, attend to their children and so on, the solemn Western convention of numbered and extremely confined seating, makes the experience unnecessarily arduous and formal.

If Parts II and III were conflated into one and the performance ran from midnight to dawn, perhaps the symmetry of the work would have been better preserved while still permitting the resolution and implications of the story to coincide with the first glimmerings of daylight.

As it is, too many splendid moments in *The Mahabharata* become buried in turgid repetition and images are dulled by the tyrannies of the storyline. When that happens, more, unfortunately, becomes less.

Murray Bramwell

"Day for Night" The Adelaide Review, No.48, March, 1988, (Festival edition), pp.30-31.

Shallow

Published: 1988-03-01 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

1841 by Michael Gow State Theatre Company Playhouse

Theatre commissions are a bit like cargo cults. Titles are announced, brochures printed, runways are built and everybody waits for the play to land triumphantly. Except that, more often than not, it either overshoots the tarmac or pancakes unceremoniously in the midst of consternation and disbelief.

When the State Theatre Company secured the services of Michael Gow to write a play for the 1988 Adelaide Festival with additional support from the Bicentennial Authority (in the form of prestige and a wheelbarrow full of money) it was undoubtedly a coup.

Gow's plays *Away* and *Europe* have received justifiable praise and the opportunity of a major commission honours a genuine theatrical talent. But *1841* should have been 1815 because this time Gow has met his Waterloo.

Gow's narrator, Aurora, is the spirit of European revolutionary enlightenment come to Australia in 1841, the year nothing happened. Gow's history is one that should have happened and never happened. Instead of Aurora's vision of a new future, the worst of the past came from Over There to pillage, murder and founder in cynicism and defeat.

Aurora is a beacon to Mercy, a young woman in service seeking a new way, and Lynch, a convict ready to make new beginnings. Some like Sullivan have survived ordeals with decency intact, other such as Williams and Doyle are corrupt beyond redemption.

There are clear moral and historical symmetries in Gow's play but they don't get beyond diagrams on graph paper. As narrative it is scattered to the point of incompetence, as theatre it is intolerably dull.

Robert Kemp's quirky design does nothing to anchor Gow's disconnected whimsies. Actors rise lugubriously from trapdoors in the centre of the stage, tiny props of ships and houses inadequately suggest displacements of scale. Stumps in the forest look like a set for a hobbit musical and some of the costumes look like they've fallen off the back of the Mardi Gras. If this style had a name it would be High Kemp.

Brett Guerin's music is New Age for old but in combination with Gow's orotund rhetoric the effect is often ponderous.

The actors look plainly uncomfortable. Gillian Jones as Aurora opens with a prologue which is a mixture of T.S. Eliot and Leviticus - "My failure fills my mouth, despair stuffs my throat like sand, defeat strangles me." It sounds all well and good but Gow uses such speeches to plug the play like polyfilla.

Others fare no better. Heather Mitchell as Mercy stands bravely in yet another theatrical waste land which has no place either in life or the imagination. John Gaden pulls out some comic turns from his bag of tricks to little avail and Steven Vidler as Lynch is hanged if he can make it work either.

Don Barker and Barbara West give lustreless, bewildered performances and when Patrick Frost appears on stage in modern dress, taking tourist snaps of a convict graveyard and doing a xerox of his performance in *Away*, then we know that the play has disappeared up something very fundamental indeed.

As directors, Gaden and Gow have let this scrappy saga drag at sepulchral speed in the belief that the rhythms of the language will galvanise the audience with its Seriousness of Purpose. They don't. In fact dragooned matriculation candidates were snickering audibly and those more polite prayed for a fire drill.

It is disastrous that such a silly play should be STC's Festival entry, especially since Stephen Sewell's *Dreams in an Empty City* represented such a courageous choice in 1986. Michael Gow in his attempt to define his work against the costume dramas and convict soapies that have addled film and TV audiences for the last five years, has found nothing of substance to offer.

In its capricious, politically shallow gesturing *1841* is neither effectively against the past nor about it. But one thing is for sure - in its present or any other form, it is certainly history.

"Shallow" *The Adelaide Review*,No.49, March, 1988, p.30.

Adelaide Festival - The Dragon's Trilogy

Published: 1988-04-01 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Adelaide Festival

The Dragon’s Trilogy Theatre Repere de Quebec Directed by Robert Lepage Design and Couture : Jean-Francais and Gilles Dube Music: Robert Caux Thebarton Theatre . March 1988.

Every now and then a production appears which is so imaginative that it makes everything else look like radio with mime. Such a play is Theatre Repere of Quebec’s *The Dragon’s Trilogy*, a Canadian work which was presented in the last week of the Adelaide Festival and inexplicably has been accorded a tepid reception from some reviewers and audiences.

The play spans 76 years and three cities, is performed in three languages and audaciously blends a quirky array of detail. Any description one might undertake would not sound promising. The play opens in a parking lot in Quebec City where the old Chinatown district used to be. Voices intone that we are embarking on a journey West while figures stand motionless in what looks like an illuminated tollbooth. This saga then traces the genealogies of William Crawford a shoe salesman, Mr Wong an old Chinese landlord, a drunken barber and his daughter Jeanne, and her friend Francoise. These connections criss-cross by coincidence and karma as events move to Toronto, Vancouver, the present and, with a kind of Doppler Effect, ricochet back to the past again.

It really is that cosmic. In fact in deference to the statistic that the Chinese population in Toronto is larger than the French-speaking one, the play is loaded with Eastern philosophy - the dragons in the title refer to the potential within each individual, forces of creativity but also dangerous energy if not resolved. If one were to dwell on the text delivered, often in triplicate - English, Quebecquois and Mandarin - it might sound like a three hour fortune cookie . Instead the splendidly orchestrated dramatics give *The Dragon’s Trilogy* an authority and power rare in any theatre.

Director Robert Lepage has been fearlessly filmic in his presentation. The narrative darts from one short scene to another; dialogue in French is easily construed by gesture, music and context- besides, the play itself is about the barriers and limits of language. Characters struggle to make themselves understood linguistically and emotionally. It can be comic as well. “A star is born?” Crawford asks Wong incredulously. “The store was burned” was the actual message. Neatly, like so very much in the play the images of fire,birth and constellations are prefigured and repeated in its poetic texture. The subject matter is almost alarmingly accidental – infrequent in the theatre but more common, and readily acceptable, in film. Lepage and his five associate authors prove that the imagination can make indelible metaphor with the most homely images.

The footsteps the characters follow are depicted by the use of shoes which reappear in the play with delightful invention. Shoeboxes pave the actors path, configurations of shoes indicate a marriage or a family. Wong’s son declares his commitment to Jeanne, pregnant to a soldier, by presenting her with a tiny pair of shoes. When she goes into labour he delivers the child with tender care and we are presented again symbolically with the pair of shoes. It is a beautiful image, superbly calculated.

Later in Act II, set in wartime, the soldiers on leave with their girlfriends begin to tramp the rectangular perimeter of the acting area in ice skates. The marching becomes more insistent, the younger Wong hastily rearranges pairs of shoes to keep them clear of the armies’ tread, he becomes more panicked and frantically tries to protect the little white shoes indicating the children in his family. Then, just as the hypnotic bowed string sounds of Caux’s synthesizer soundtrack reaches greater intensity the troops storm into the acting area brutally kicking shoes in all directions. The effect of such an image is indescribably affecting, many in the audience were on the verge of tears.

Such a response is not accidental. Lepage and the players had prepared for such an emotional peak with scrupulous care. Lepage and Theatre Repere have received well-merited acclaim for this production, distinctive not only for its theatrical invention but its warmth and humanity. Like the tiny lights in Pierre’s installation sculpture in Act III *The Dragon’s Trilogy* is not only illuminating but it twinkles with good humour.

“The Dragon’s Trilogy, *Lowdown*, Vol.10, No.2, April/May, 1988, p.78.

Beauty and the Beast

Published: 1988-04-01 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

by David Holman Magpie Theatre Company, South Australia Directed by Chris Johnson

Design: Julie Lynch. Music: Alan John. Cast: Annabel Giles, Sharon LeRay, Claudia LaRose, Michael Habib, Tom Considine, Tim Aris.

Reviewed by Murray Bramwell

This is the third Adelaide Festival in which the Magpie Theatre Company has staged a new work by David Holman. It was the celebrated *No Worries* in 1984, and in 1986 *The Small Poppies.* But with *Beauty and the Beast* it has been third time not-so-lucky for the Magpie/ Holman collaboration.

This is largely due to the fact that David Holman has made an adaptation which has proved to be less than adaptable to an Australian setting. Madame Leprince de Beaumont's original fairy tale *La Belle et La Bete* is a quintessentially European work. Or, at least, its nexus is emphatically in a European tradition, a fact which has been emphasised by Jean Cocteau's immortal film of *Beauty and the Beast* made in 1946.

Cocteau's elegant Beast, looking like Sir Philip Sidney with fangs and a face full of steel wool, emanated a genteel eroticism and a weary melancholy. He seemed to epitomize Europe itself, waiting to be revitalised by youth unencumbered by the cobwebs of the past.

Holman has intuited this element and one admires the impulse to develop it imaginatively. But set in an unspecified Australia of the 19thcentury his fable of the old and new worlds cannot get a proper leverage and it is left revving in neutral.

The clear symmetries of the original story have been retained. The father, ruined when his ship is lost, looks to his three daughters for support. Two disappoint him with their self-concern while Beauty, the favourite, gives good counsel. When she is asked what she would have him bring back from his travels she requests a red rose. But when he plucks one from the Beast's magical garden there is hell to pay – or rather, a life to forfeit.

The father ungallantly allows Beauty to return in his place and the Beast begins to court her with what amounts to a series of impeccable tantrums. In making the family Irish, the Beast a sort of vulpine squatter, and casting young black actress Claudia LaRose as Beauty, Holman and director Chris Johnson have given the play interesting political resonances but they are tentative and only serve to underline the fact that the story is largely resistant to alteration.

The Beast in the Outback is an historical enigma, classless without even the cultural trappings of a castle. There is no old order for him to represent and he does not translate to any indigenous framework either. Similarly, the Irishness of the characters is merely picturesque when the play itself has an underdefined context.

Chris Johnson has directed broadly and the effect is a further coarsening of what is a subtle text both in the original and in Holman's recasting. The play is amiably presented but the stage Irish accents and blustery deliveries from some actors make it all a bit more bull and bush than necessary.

Michael Habib is too declamatory as Ryan, the father, but as ever he is an actor with great warmth. Tom Considine gives a better performance than his Darby O'Gill accent might suggest and Sharon LeRay's dizzy Bernadette and Annabel Giles' petulant Bridie mostly succeed - although we are quite unprepared, thematically and psychologically, for their transformation into Goneril and Regan in the final scene of the play.

Claudia LaRose, highly successful in the 1987 Come Out Festival's Holman opera *Frankie*, again gives a touching performance and Tim Aris' Beast is also carefully observed. Julie Lynch's design is one of her most assured yet with elegant maritime accoutrements, an expansive streaked and speckled backdrop and effectively used raked stage. The costumes are stylish and the Beast's mask, in dark brown with almost kangaroo-like features, is splendid.

Alan John's settings of Irish ballads are haunting and harpist Moira Lawry rendered them beautifully. This is theatre of high calibre and as always Holman and Johnson honour their young audiences with thoughtful work. But not only does *Beauty and the Beast* resist transportation to the colonies, it has cramped David Holman's usually indomitable style as well.

"Beauty and the Beast", *Lowdown*, Vol.10, No.2, April/May, 1988, p.80.

Combing the Fringe

Published: 1988-04-01 *Adelaide Fringe*

The Festival Fringe is always a bit of a chook raffle. With hundreds of events programmed, many with bizarre titles and uncertain provenance, it is difficult to know which is the best investment for the hard-earned rouble.

Daily reviews and colosseum star-ratings both hinder and help but more often it is the halitosis, or otherwise, of word-of mouth which decides. It is an unpredictable business, full of surprises - some delightful, some excruciating beyond measure.

This year's range has been more variable than most. Some offerings have been of a high standard, others, lamentably, well below. But it is no good muttering about selection committees and the like. The Fringe here, as in Edinburgh and elsewhere, is a catch-all and the players have to accept that Darwinian principles rule, even if that's not entirely OK.

It can mean that talent at times is undervalued, or discovered too late in its season. Sometimes zealous publicity can attract particular attention to a show but only quality will sustain it. For some performers it is sadly ttue that their work, however sincere, cannot expect to compete at a time when so much other entertainment is on offer in the Fringe and the main Festival.

This time the theatre programme has been stronger than cabaret and comedy. Early on, Whistling in the *Theatre's Ship of Fools*, a mordant dystopia linking the exiled outcasts on the Rhine in the late 15th century with the unemployed in the near future, defied the odds in turning disparate elements into theatrical success.

Nigel Kellaway's Sydney Front revived Marat/ Sadeian techniques for the *Pornography of Performance*. While some declared they'd seen the face of God, it was neither as profound nor innovative as claimed. Nevertheless, it offered powerful moments and one wonders what the Sydney Front might create if it sank its teeth into the late Jacobean repertoire.

In other performance experiments Lloyd Jones' La Mama group's Warnings produced some unexpectedly memorable didactic pranking with its close audience encounters of an anarchic kind.

Local Aboriginal writer Eva Johnson showcased her newest play, Murras (Pitjantjatjara for 'hands'), an earnestly direct lament for the lost arts of carving, weaving and dance. Unfortunately I missed Mainstteet Theatre's production of Bob Maza's The Keepers. Perhaps both productions will offer return seasons later in the year.

In the one-person shows, Patricia Leventon kept the home fires Boylan with *Molly Bloom*, local actor and writer Tony Mack engagingly explored the preperformance angst of Edwin Booth, brother of Lincoln's assassin, and Tanya Uren, in a critically under-valued show entitled He Gave Me His Heart far One Minute, meshed her own shrewd writing on the labours of love with those of writers as diverse as Steven Berkoff and Jamaica Kincaid.

Local singers Pat Rix and Cate O'Brien in a song cycle called Decibels celebrated the affirmative voices of women in harmony. Coached by English singer Frankie Armstrong, their music is technically accomplished and politically forthright. Among the thinner ranks of the Funnies this time there were some familiar returns. The Doug Anthony Allstars were as · rancid as ever, offering in a double bill with the literate sexual comedy of the Hot Bagels, some of the best cabaret value in the Fringe.

Even Orchestra's turned out to be a compilation, retreading material from 1986. The films seemed fuzzier and the behind-the-screens kitchen cupboard instruments had less charm. It is a pity that the orchestrators, especially the astonishing Paul "Flacco" Livingston have not been more prolific since their last visit.

Bing Hitler, alias Craig Ferguson, opened his gorbal wide for some knife and fook humour. He was Rodney Rude from the Highlands really but an amusing man for a' that. Also on the same programme, the Golden Holdens' risky form of almost-humour showed that it can be a perilously funny business, this comedy.

Combo Berko's *Slave Clowns of the Third Reich* also bounced differently for some audiences even though their manic Berkhausian clowning is scrupulous in its attention to style and these escapees from Circus Oz, Funny Stories and Tick Where Applicable are certainly no rank beginners. For me they captured the essential hilarity of Old Bavaria and their particular brand of Nuremberg thrash has yet to be heralded.

Then in the final week, Tony Strachan and Chrome's introduced the dance talents of the gifted Meme Thorne in an interesting theatre/ dance/ music study of Australian beach manners seen through a sunglass darkly. The show needs a few calibrations but as ever Strachan is pushing new boundaries - even into the sea.

Shows I was sorry to miss were Glynn Nicholas's *Glynn with a Why*, Lenny Kovner's *Mistero Bufo*, the Budapest Ensemble and Inside-Out's *The Lover and the Beloved*. You can't be everywhere but I think quite a lot of music crept by me on those waters.

Others will argue about the wisdom of the Fezbah embargo, the Fringe joining fees and the lack of support for shows outside the Living (and Partly Living) Arts Centre. The new Fringe Club Theatre is a plus but the rest of the LAC can't be tarred up with day-glo paint for too much longer. Nevertheless, supremo Rosemary Miller and her army still managed· to make an awful lot of trains run on time.

"Combing the Fringe" The Adelaide Review, No.50, April, 1988, p.30.

1990s Reviews

Get Your Festival - Fast

Published: 1990 *Adelaide Festival*

Adelaide Festival

Murray Bramwell

It is now only twelve sleeps before the 16th Adelaide Festival opens its many gates, doors and curtains. Already some shows have sold out and others are not far from it. The Vienna Singverein's Requiem with Erich Bergel and the Sydney Symphony has completely sold out and you will soon have to sing for tickets to their unaccompanied concert of choral music. Some Elder Hall concerts have sold out- including those by Paco Pena and Leo Kottke- and its getting tight for the Kronos Quartet. In the Space, Blossom Dearie and Joe Pass tickets are getting very sparse and Kate Ceberano's season is completely sold. In response to public demand she will perform an extra gig at Her Majesty's on at 8 PM. The Four Guitars concert at Thebarton Theatre is also full up.

In the theatre programme there is intense interest in the Irish Abbey Company's Shadow of the Gunman, the Leicester Haymarket's Hamlet, Australian Nouveau Theatre's The Imaginary Invalid, Archaos, Lyon Opera Ballet's Cinderella and A Matter of Chance by the Kosh. Alice in Wonderland, to be performed by Glenn Elston's players in the Botanic Gardens, has completely sold out and Midsummer Night's Dream has only a handful of tickets still available.

Now that the enthusiastic reviews are coming through from Brisbane, the first venue for Roy Hutchins' Adelaide Festival tour, interest in Whale Nation is taking off fast. The same will be true when the Australian Opera opens its six performance sell-out season of Tristan and Isolde at the Sydney Opera House tonight.

The Adelaide Festival offers well over 600 performances and events so it is not so much one festival but a multitude of them - in music, theatre, dance, visual arts and as many hybrids of these as you can imagine. Whatever your taste, there is a programme for you - much of it free of charge or only modestly priced. On the first weekend in March you can come into Elder Park on Friday night to hear the State Opera's Tosca featuring celebrated soprano Joan Carden and back again on Saturday night for the Don Burrows, James Morrison and Kate Ceberano and a host of other fireworks- and none of it will cost you a cracker. Many of the performances are modestly priced -some little more than the price of a movie ticket, a great many are less than the cost of a meal. And it is important to remember that in the Adelaide Festival the world comes to you. Artists from all over Europe, Asia and North America travels thousands of air miles to perform - and all you have to do is get into into the centre of town.

One of the secrets of the festival's success is that ticket buyers not only go for the things they know they will enjoy but they are also prepared to experiment and take a punt on something a bit different and interesting. These impulses are invariably well rewarded and are often the most valued festival experiences. This often creates unexpected hits during festival time which remain talking points long after the season is over. In recent festivals the Rustaveli Company and Sankei Juku come to mind as examples but many others also suggest themselves.

This festival, L'Ecran Humain (the Human Screen) from Canada with their three-dimensional sound/dance collage, Universe, may well become such a hit as could Theatre Mandragore, the worlds first 'cinematographic theatre company' from Belgium. If you are looking for something really off the wall Archaos from France should definitely do the trick. You might well need to have a lie-down afterwards.

In the tradition of the Rustavelis, the Georgian Film Actors' Studio's presentation of Don Juan and Bacula's Pig promise much. Don't be deterred by the fact that they are performed in Georgian- after the Rustaveli's Richard III we know that it is not a problem. As the Soviet civil rights movement progresses, more attention will be paid to the courageous contribution made by the Georgian theatre. They are not to be missed.

In the tradition of the Bicentennial festival in 1988, there are some distinguished Indian artists performing - Kathakali, the ethnic theatre and dance company from South India and Ali Akbar Khan, master of the sarod. Festival director, Clifford Hocking, promised that many more strings would be plucked this festival and Ali Akbar Khan's will be some of the most sublime.

In the orchestral and chamber music programme there is a swag to choose from- soloists such as pianists Melvyn Tan and Jean-Yves Thibaudet and the tenor Peter Schreier (probably the finest performer of Schubert lieder anywhere in the world) as well as chamber groups such as Duo Crommelynk and the Clemencic Consort. In new 20th century music, the marvellous Kronos Quartet are returning along with one of New York's most inventive new composers, Steve Reich.

So it's time to get out the programme , texta and diary and start finalising your particular festival invasion plan. Don't forget Artists' and Writers' Week while you are at it, and the outdoor programme .Just remember, your festival doesn't have to cost you hundreds - it may be little more than the price of the family's ice cream.

Preview for 1990 Adelaide Festival . Publication details unknown.

Adelaide Fringe

Published: 1990-03-01 *Adelaide Fringe · Comedy*

Found Objects

Lion Theatre

Until March 11.

4 Stars. “Definitely take the plunge- endearingly funny.”

Found Objects are the unrivalled exponents of wet comedy and in their latest show, Plunge, these three stooges remind us what it’s like to be nerds at the beach. What’s more, they sing- “My Grandmother is a Fuddy Duddy” and their dolphin tribute “We Are the Hippies of the Sea” accompanied on guitar , trombone and pan pipes.

They are also big on props- foam bike helmets, novelty sandcastles, metal detectors and other triumphs of stage illusion. In the tradition of Funny Stories and Tick Where Applicable, this group traffic in dingbat gags and shaggy routines . Clever, modest and endearingly funny - Found Objects are worth discovering.

Murray Bramwell

(Early version of comedy act - Lano and Woodley)

The Advertiser, March 1990

Off the Rails

Published: 1990-03-01 *Adelaide Festival*

A Matter of Chance The Kosh Odeon Theatre

The most decisive events often depend on the slightest chances, the longest coincidences, the merest whims. Vladimir Nabokov, master of pale ironies and constructor of crystalline prose, wrote *A Matter of Chance* in 1924. It concerns a Russian emigre couple, separated by circumstances, who, unknown to each other, are both travelling on the Berlin-Paris Express.

The woman, neurasthenic with hunger and anxiety, has been following various leads in the hope of being reunited with her husband. He, suicidally depressed, is working on the train as a waiter in the dining car. Unfolding like a languid thriller, the story has us always wondering whether a Zhivago like resolution is going to take place.

Adapted by Roger McGough and performed by English dance company, The Kosh, under the direction of Michael Merwitzer and Sian Williams, *A Matter of Chance*, has an enticing idea to work with. The opening scene - passengers in homburgs and drab gabardine, shuffling in formation with their suitcases along the platform - promises much. It is visually strong, enhanced by the strong synthesised chords from Howard Davidson's score, but hardly has the whistle blown than *A Matter of Chance* heads for a destination unknown.

There is an unresolved contradiction between text and action which burdens the work. The story, elegant, suggestive, neurotic, is essentially about alienation and separation - but the action consists of highly tactile tumbling and acrobatics which is entirely dissonant. The point of the story is that lives don't touch and yet everywhere the performers are cheerfully flipping and connecting with positivistic certainty.

The design also is discrepant. The George Grosz cartoon grotesquery of the Man in Beige, the bright red and yellow stripes of the railway guards and the heavy crayon make-up and fabric patterning, lends a pop Weimar dimension but, abstracted, satiric and generic, this works against idiosyncratic, almost fin-de siecle decadence.

A Matter of Chance offers plenty of opportunity for railway noises and vigorous mime, but instead of going to the plaintive heart of its object, it takes us round the houses instead.

"Off the Rails" *The Adelaide Review*, No.74, March, 1990, p.31.

Kahlo is the Thematic Centrepiece

Published: 1990-03-23 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

1990 Festival Visual Arts

Festival Exhibitions Visions, Maps and Dreamings Frida Kahlo

The visual arts exhibitions have always been a big draw for the Adelaide Festival and this year's are no exception. There are differences this time, though, which are likely to set patterns for the future. Firstly, the festival organisers themselves have initiated exhibitions and taken care to incorporate themes in the overall programme.

Daniel Thomas, Director of the Art Gallery of South Australia, is well pleased with this trend. "Clifford Hocking is a maestro," he beams, "a maestro is someone who brings things together, which he has done in a way no other Adelaide Festival director has. He had a clear idea of a Latin American component running through the programme. Tango," -Thomas raises an eyebrow to announce his pun- "is a footnote to Frida Kahlo."

Commissioned by the festival management the Frida Kahlo exhibition was the result of what Daniel Thomas describes as "difficult and complex" negotiation. Curated by Charles Merewether, it remains on display until April 8 when it will move to Perth for its only other Australian showing. Drawn from a variety of sources including the private collection of Robert Holmes a Court, the Kahlo exhibition is the first to be indemnified by the Bannon State Government. Thomas sees this as a significant precedent not only because it circumvents the cumbersome federal process but it makes it possible to initiate further small-scale exhibitions from Adelaide.

Charles Merewether is singularly apt when he refers in the catalogue notes to Frida Kahlo's piercing insights. Born in Mexico City in 1907 she began painting in 1925 while convalescing from horrific injuries sustained when the bus in which she was travelling collided with a streetcar. From the age of eighteen until her death in 1954 Kahlo was tormented by physical pain and endured a series of largely futile operations which left her addicted to drugs and alcohol. At the age of twenty-two she married the celebrated Mexican muralist, Diego Rivera. Twice her age she lived in turbulent, violent relationship with him for twenty five years.

It is only relatively recently that Frida Kahlo's work has come out from under the shadow of Rivera's fame. Unlike his gargantuan murals of heroic colllective purpose, Kahlo's art is miniature and idiosyncratic. Like Artaud or Sylvia Plath her subject is herself, her own case. Echoing the naivete of traditional Mexican ex voto offertory painting Kahlo's works often flatly deny perspective and with niggardly brush strokes she matter-of-factly depicts her life as hospital patient, martyred lover and sorceress.

The effect can be alarming as in the stark violence of A Few Small Nips where the blood from the tortured woman splotches even on to the picture frame and imminently, it seems, into the world of the viewer. Henry Ford Hospital, a naked self-portrait, also on a blood-stained bed, depicts the artist surrounded by surreal objects- a snail, a metallic looking pelvis, a totemic foetus and a vulvate flower. The pictures teem with images of fecundity and profusion with succulent botany, sleek cats and nonchalant monkeys. But, as in The Bride who becomes Frightened when she sees Life Open, cut melons, paw-paws, coconuts and pineapples become sinister Venus fly-traps,elements of still-life poised to strike. Another work is actually entitled Still Life with Prickly Pears.

As the accompanying photographs in this exhibition of Frida Kahlo attest, she was herself an art object, dressed eccentrically in Mexican ceremonial costume, she braided and decorated her hair as if in sacrifice or obsequies. Her griefs and terrors are unleashed upon a world that recognises them as both forbidden and familiar. The particulars of personal cauchemar also reveal the national psyche. With a necklace of thorns Frida foresuffers all and is inexplicably triumphant.

For that reason The Broken Column, which might have seemed terrible to contemplate, is curiously consoling. Like Sylvia Plath, in life Frida Kahlo was defeated but in art she is fierce and resolute. Eyes raining tears, the spine a column of crumbling culture, her body tormented by tacks and a racking brace, the image paradoxically suggests reconstruction, even perhaps a costume fitting for a future conquest. The heavy brows and level eyes bespeak extraordinary resilience.

As a complement to the Frida Kahlo exhibition, Charles Merewether has assembled recent Mexican works by Monica Castillo, , Nahum Zenil, German Venegas, Georgina Quintana and others in Out of the Profane, identifying what he calls " a hybrid reality, a culture of differing and conflicting realities, where the past and present merge." At the Armoury, part of the splendidly restored Migration Museum on North Terrace, a photographic collection, on loan from the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford, reveals the revolutionary lens of Alexander Rodchenko.His portraits of Mayakovsky have immortalised the writer's glowering image long after his poetry has receded. Rodchenko's work of the twenties and thirties celebrate physical culture and images of progress, radio towers, cogs, pylons, the angular, abstracted icons of the body electric.

But there is also affection in the Radio Listener, a winsome portrait of the photographer's daughter , and two homely works of his old Soviet mum complete with specs and fag. Rodchenko's celebrated photomontages can also be seen -as in the cover for LEF where a giant fountain pen is unleashed from a biplane against a simian figure about to loose an arrow. Another work entitled Political Football has sportsmen in English bobby helmets towering over stadiums full of troops. Rodchenko's work embraces the everyday and the modern, ideology and abstraction, with verve and humanity. Buffeted by the fractious dictates of Stalinism Rodchenko nevertheless escaped gulag and firing squad, and continued to make photographs of the unusual in the ordinary.

Dreamings, a major exhibition of Aboriginal works curated by Dr Peter Sutton, Head of the Anthropology Division, has returned from showings in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles, to a refurbished display space at the South Australian Museum. With all but four or five exceptions the 103 paintings, figurines, toas and other objects on display are 2oth century works. It is an impressive collection, augmented by a substantial catalogue prepared by Dr Sutton and associates, Christopher Anderson, Phillip Jones, Francoise Dussart and Steven Hemmimg.

This exhibition is comprehensive geographically and generically with sculptures and bark paintings from Cape York Peninsula through Arnhem Land to Central and South Australia. It also seeks to locate the works in aesthetic and cultural context.

Peter Sutton writes in the excellent and copiously illustrated Dreamings book - "The meaningfulness of Aboriginal art to Aborigines has gradually been emerging from a long period in which it has been ignored by non-Aborigines, apart from a few anthropologists, collectors and art curators. These meanings have thus far remained largely irrelevant to the appreciation of Aboriginal art works as objects of intense attention, as forms with high aesthetic potential. An acknowledgment that they mean something literal to Aborigines, rather than any particular grasp of the relationship and the literal meaning and aesthetic experience, has tended to constitute the basis of a kind of distant respect for the content of the works."

In explaining Dreamings as Ancestral Beings operating in an eternal present Sutton emphasises concepts that do not easily compute for the desacralised Western mind. That the world around us might all be imbued with precise meaning, that the land is actually its own map- these ideas are not readily dreamed of in our philosophy. So in providing an opportunity to widen our conceptual grasp of Aboriginal metaphysics and showing that Aboriginal art is as full of condensed and coded meaning as DNA, this exhibition challenges us not only to recognise these works as art and not artefacts or curiosities but also to acknowledge the integrity of culture which continues to produce them.

It is no wonder this exhibition had an enormous impact on the more than half a million Americans who visited it in the US or that the Asia Society Galleries in New York was so enthusiastic to tour it. From Djawida and Bilinyarra Nabegeyo's Female Lightning Figures (ochre on bark from West Arnhem Land) to the Toas from Lake Eyre and the increasingly familiar acrylic painting of the Western Desert, Dreamings presents an extraordinarily rich and varied display of individual and collective imagination.

Building on work carried out conscientiously by many collectors and researchers, Peter Sutton and his associates have assembled a remarkable exhibition and an equally valuable book on a subject of moment to anyone interested in sustainable futures whether for the world or the mind. Dreamings: The Art of Aboriginal Australia has been published by Viking and retails at $35 paperback. To coin a phrase, every home should have one.

An innovation for the Adelaide Festival in 1990 has been the introduction of the Adelaide Biennial. Modelled on the Whitney Biennial of American Art, it proposes a view of trends and achievements in recent Australian work. Mary Eagle, Curator of Australian Art at the Australian National Gallery, was chosen as guest curator of the Biennial (not to be confused, by the way with the internationally oriented Sydney Biennale) with a brief to seek work "throughout all regions of Australia and to think twice before choosing work from Melbourne or Sydney -those big art-market cities that make younger artists feel oppressed. The wider audience for art is more likely than the artists to take it for granted that the best art can crop up anywhere."

Mary Eagle also wanted to make an exhibition drawn from life- "the art did not rise out of theory, or art journals, but from a broader social experience." She remarks on the tendency in past decades for works "to be like commercials, to seek instant attention, to persuade immediately." As Daniel Thomas has noted, Eagle has chosen "slower and quieter work, worth looking at longer. This is work whose material presence is important. The craft aspect- paint craft, wood craft, is important. There is a sensuous physical presence of the work of art ,not just its imagery. This has been welcomed by practical artists."

There is an evident richness in this respect whether in the disturbing contradictions of solidity and disconnection in the figures of Tom Albert's Conversation with a Sceptic or the lush brushwork of Jeff Burgess's gouache, Gatepost: Moorleah. There is wit and ingenuity of material in Rosalie Gascoigne's Hill Station, 1989 (in builders board and galvanised iron) and in Monaro, constructed from shredded soft drink crates. A high point in the exhibition is Fiona Hall's series of twenty-three sculptures in tin and aluminium. From wound-open sardine tins meticulously filigreed genital images are revealed which in turn sprout into botanically precise domestic, exotic and native plants. The effect is both sardonic and erotic, a garden of earthly delights with a cutting edge.

Mary Eagle has included works by Aboriginal artists Rover Thomas, Tjunkaya Tapaya, Dorothy Gallaledba, England Bangala and Les Midikuria , as well Gordon Bennett whose Outsider powerfully confronts themes of cultural conflict. Of the thirty eight artists represented , eleven were born outside Australia and this multiplicity of influence is apparent. The exhibition reflects diversity in subject matter, gender perception and medium, works on video, installations, photographic montages are all included.This exhibition, sponsored by Santos, will continue, in Adelaide only, until April 16.

Daniel Thomas wanted the Biennial to complement the Artists Week programme and his hopes have been fulfilled. With guest speakers such as Robert Hughes and Geeta Kapur providing opposing views on the 'centres' of art and their spheres of imperial influence and division between artists and art theorists about the lingua franca of discourse, Mary Eagle's examination of art at the margins and contention for an art of the visible world rather than of the world of art theory has anticipated important and interesting questions. Daniel Thomas couldn't be happier -"It has touched the moment perfectly, she has fulfilled her brief -perfectly." Murray Bramwell

"Kahlo is the Thematic Centrepiece" The Australian Financial Review, March 23, 1990.

Fringe Comedy

Published: 1990-04-01 *Adelaide Fringe · Comedy*

Murray Bramwell

There is something likeably democratic about the Fringe's published programme. In alphabetic order under general headings, it is the great leveller- events are listed with sublime even-handedness. The good, the bad and the ugly are all equal in the sight of the Fringe creators.

The only trouble is that this doesn't make it easy for the poor punter looking for a winner or even something each way.Add to that the absence of a comprehensive box office at Fringe Centre and confusion is a short step from apathy. There were enough troubles at peak times - like work lunch-times and early evenings- getting BASS bookings for anything at all, Fringe or Festival, so it would hardly be surprising if the fine young Fringe cannibals used to making on- the -spot choices either bought an on-the-spot ticket for Little Sisters or decided to take a walk.

The cabaret and theatre programme both indicated a changing pattern. The Little Sisters programme was packaged from Melbourne and the shift was to the television- tested and burlesque. The Fringe, scene of the Cabbage Brothers, Tick Where Applicable, Funny Stories, Even Orchestra and the pre-Big Gig Doug Anthony's now seems to be in a time lag from Tuesday Night Live. The sudden popularity of Australian comedy on TV is double-edged - it raises recognition exponentially it also demolishes subtlety and decimates six month's material in a single night.

The biggest draws at Little Sisters were The Dougs, the Bachelors from Prague and Swinging Sidewalks -all staples for Melbourne variety TV. Gerry Connolly showed his intelligence as a mimic actor but he was rather shaky live. The Great Big Opera led by counter-tenor Jon Jackson with the Spectoral synthesiser sound of Greg Riddell and Allan Walker introduced high calibre camp while co-billed comic Rachel Berger worked sub-Harmer territory. Mention should be made again of Paul Livingstone's Flacco -Eat Carpet credit squeezer and monologist without peer. He first amazed the Fringe in 1986 and these days he is appearing on the Big Gig. The Doug Anthony's made a smart move getting him on their bill for Edinburgh and then- after a late scratching by Gerry Sadowitz- Adelaide also.

My comedy favourites were Found Objects who dispense wet gags with silly props and avoid the tired hydrophobics that the Doug Anthony Allstars now dispense to a whole new audience . For me, nothing quite touched the slow-moving weirdness of the Slave Clowns of the Third Reich from the 1988 Fringe. But this is no place for misty nostalgia.

The theatre programme, seemed thinner this time with fewer inter-state shows braving the Malthusian conditions for Fringe performance. The Rag and Bone company, former VCA students drew attention with their Bluebeard , while the Bastinado company from Sydney holed up at the Balcony for three shows. I saw only the Picasso work Desire Caught by the Tail, a play famous for its author, which was nevertheless strong and engaging theatre. It made you a bit wistful for the extravagant theatrics of Nigel Kellaway's Sydney Front.

Some local groups worked more traditional material -the Celtic Circle could probably have done a three week season of their Under Milk Wood and Flinders University Drama Centre students played to full houses for their J.M.Synge one-acters at the Red Shed. I'm sorry to have missed are the Aboriginal Cultural Institute's Up the Ladder, new works by Vitalstatistix and Darrelyn Gunzburg and interstate visitors Handspan and Entr'acte.

One local show reflected the tenacity of theatre-making. Put together from their own funds Suna Productions' Salome and Acts of Contortion played about a dozen performances at the New Century. Written by local writer Jenny Boult with additional material from Kathy Acker, Acts of Contortion told a story not unlike that of Wedekind's Lulu. Director Doug Leonard took a dash of Weimar and a lashing of Fassbinder to tell the story of Zilla the headless woman. The paper gave it a stinko review devoid of specifics. It was rough theatre, with artless performances but it deserved better.

The irony for this year was that the Festival's Archaos was the star Fringe attraction and the best show in the Fringe belonged in the main festival. The Attis Theatre from Athens gave only one performance of Euripides Bacchae as part of Glendi. Using Artaudian and traditional quasi-yogic techniques the five actors under the direction of Theodoros Terzopoulos went for the savage heart of the most disturbing work in the classical repertoire.

Performed entirely in Greek with deft physicality and extraordinary mental concentration this Bacchae brought us closer to the dionysian paradox than most tunic and olive branch re-creations ever could. The Attis Company who have worked with the Berliner Ensemble and toured extensively in Europe and North America, played unheralded in the Scott Theatre. If you hadn't looked between Antebodies and Bastinado in the Fringe programme you would have missed them.

With the doors finally closing on the Living Arts Centre there are more questions than ever on the future of the Fringe. As the festival continues to programme its own fringe the official Fringe starts to look like a poor relation, offering much the same but with a grungy ambience and uncertain value for money .

If we were really in a recession and not a time of beautiful numbers, the Fringe might be seen as a bad risk for performer and customer alike. It is not hard to imagine a future where the crowds come in for the cabaret head-liners and then buzz off back to the Fezbah for brandy crustas. Everyone expects the Fringe to be out on the edge but no-one wants it to become marginal. In the past decade the Fringe has achieved a great deal but left to grow unchecked and unconsidered it could well be swamped by its own endeavour.

"Fringe" The Adelaide Review, No.75, April, 1990, p.21.

Festival

Published: 1990-04-01 *Adelaide Festival*

1990 Adelaide Festival Murray Bramwell

Reviewing an arts festival is a bit like being locked up in a sweet shop. You can savour only so many creams, crunches, pralines and truffles before a drowsy numbness pains the sense and the pancreas tires of life. The effect of this kind of exquisite burn-out can be that you mistake satiety for dissatisfaction and blame Clifford Hocking for it.

There have already been harsh exchanges about the jaded responses of local reviewers and I don't want to re-open old saws. But it is pertinent to acknowledge that reviewers have a privileged overview of the festival and it is important to be judicious and avoid shallow ungenerosities. Often complimentaries can make us uncomplimentary.

With a programme the size of the Adelaide Festival most people -that is, the ones who buy their own tickets -have to choose one or two, at most a cluster of events and hope that these will turn out to be the juiciest plums. But what do you base this choice on ? It might be the Munchausen prose and enticing photography of the festival booklet, or recognition of favourite works and familiar artists. Others may decide on strict party lines for music, theatre or dance. Whatever the strategy, people hope- some with exaggerated expectations others with uncritical ones- that their particular festival will be an exceptional experience.

The festival's theatre programme had some pitfalls for those who followed the classical ticket only. The Abbey's Shadow of the Gunman for instance was an airless experience - a theatrical equivalent of cryonics. Presented with the full solemnities of fourth wall naturalism, Ben Barnes production of the least substantial of O'Casey's Dublin trilogy was faithful unto death with its wax matches and blotting paper but the context of the play has vastly changed since 1926.

In first performance the O'Casey plays had the impact and importance of Lawler's Doll in this country. But with their political prevarication and the presentation of Irish men as the celtic equivalent of Rastus and women as martyred and long-suffering mammie, these plays now largely serve reactionary ends. Watching this production Margaret Thatcher and her policy makers could feel vindicated. That said, Garrett Keogh's Davoren and Johnny Murphy as Seamus Shields were spirited, precise performances and the work still has its moments as melodrama. Nevertheless, it is a pity that the Abbey, significant in the history of world theatre, should be touring a fossil.

The much-heralded Yuri Lyubimov Hamlet performed by the Leicester Haymarket theatre was not just a disappointment, it was a dud. Both in concept and performance it was severely deficient and it will be unfortunate if it is seen, especially by young audiences, as indicative of current trends and standards in Shakespearean staging. One can only lament once more that the English Shakespeare Company's Wars of the Roses were fought for so few when they were performed in Adelaide in late 1988. They would have made a sensational centrepiece for a festival.

The Georgian Film Actors Studio also came on a wave of expectation, particularly since their parent company the Rustavellis left festival audiences in 1986 with such a provocative barrage of after-images. The Film Actors' Don Juan took some adjustments which not all were prepared to make. The reading of Moliere's sometimes cryptic figure of vice seemed breezily whimsical on the gender issue in particular although there are astonishing performances by Zurab Kiphidze as the suavely flowing Don, Amiran Amiranashvili as Sganarelle and Laura Rekhviashvili as the Prompt, a frame device introduced by director Michail Tumanishvili to provide an intriguing reminder that Don Juan is not only a play, he is also only an actor.

Bacula's Pig, performed just three times in the final weekend of the festival, was a more satisfying production. Based on a short story written in 1912 by David Kldiashvili it concerns Galaktion, a peasant whose family is being driven bonkers by the neighbour Bacula's marauding pigs. Getting no help from the council he decides to intimidate Bacula by ostentatiously inviting local officials for a feast. Ramez Ioseliani plays Galaktion with splendid poise and pathos given powerful support from Laura Rekhviashvili as his exasperated wife. The leads from Don Juan -Kipshidze and Amiranashvili- both provide brilliant comic detail in the feast scene in particular where the ensemble performance reminded us of the Rustavellis at their finest.

Bacula's Pig with its themes of civic corruption and the helplessness of individuals- except as anonymous informers - has sharp implications for Soviet society before glasnost. The Georgians particularly through their theatre and anti-Stalinist films such as Repentance, had courageously found metaphors for dissent when dissent was impossible. It has been noted that now with the open declaration of a civil rights movement the Russian theatre has all but collapsed- having found covert and indirect forms it has now been superseded by direct action. The Georgians, abroad for several years with this gentle repertoire, will no doubt be returning to forge new forms for new circumstances.

The State Theatre's choice of the Peter Weiss classic The Persecution and Assassination of Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the asylum of Charenton under the direction of the Marquis de Sade could have been fraught with problems. The play is almost plagued by legendary status after memorable European productions and Peter Brook's 1964 RSC version famous for putting a tiger in Britain's theatrical tank. The film was widely seen and for many, Marat/Sade became a sixties icon, the barricade person's Hair.

Director Simon Phillips and music director Ian MacDonald have proven that this fine play has not been lost to mythology, or become so circumscribed by time and place that people think it's old chapeau. The politics of the Terror, like those of post-Ceausescu Rumania, are revolution's bad dream and the split between the abstract idealism of Marat and the amoral sensualism of de Sade seems even more plainly the the schism which sunders us culturally and individually. This play surely one of the best in the past thirty years is still having its day. Under Phillips' direction, the performers provide sharp, intelligent theatre- notably Geoffrey Rush as Marat, Jane Menelaus as Corday and Bob Hornery's haughty but fleshy de Sade. McDonald's music does justice to Richard Peaslee's great score and although Shaun Gurton's design is a bit too Persil white of costume and tile it does add contemporary obsession to its meaning. In all, State has done well -Phillips will not please those who want theatre rougher or those who want it more genteel, but the festival was a courageous time to test his audience and first up he has shown his considerable theatrical ability.

Local company Red Shed's Frankenstein's Children (written by Shed member David Carlin and directed by Tim Maddock), also stood up well alongside other festival offerings. A tale exhumed from the Victorian dreadfuls and the history of the Burke and Hare murders, the play recounts the practice of robbing graves to increase the body of 19th century medical knowledge. Complete with crimes , songs and a few jokes, Carlin's dialogue is sharp and effective although the play runs too long for narrative comfort and performances are uneven. Nevertheless, led by Eileen Darley, Joey Kennedy and Sally Hillyard, with Frankenstein's Children the Red Shed has put another season of life in the East End Market.

Interstate theatre at the Festival proved to be mixed. The well-regarded Australian Nouveau Theatre (Anthill) production of The Imaginary Invalid directed by Jean-Pierre Mignon was worse than poorly. Making unimaginative use of the Armoury Lawns, a group of usually able actors- including Malcolm Robertson and Ross Williams -abandoning all hope of making Moliere work for a contemporary audience, proceeded perhaps vainly in the name of commedia dell' arte, to indulge themselves in terminal mugging and coarse acting. I was relieved to see that some in the audience were enjoying it but I also heard quite a few footsteps ringing behind mine as I took off across the cobbles next to the Migration Museum at interval.

Glen Elston's A Midsummer Night's Dream in the Botanic Gardens was quite another matter. An outside chance, I thought in prospect, ill-met at midnight. But snappy performances by a cast of only nine -there was so much doubling Peter Quince had to send in his apologies in Act V Scene i- as well as smart percussion by Michael Barker, shrewd design by Laurel Frank and others, made this production a delight. Cut to the bone and directed at breakneck speed by Elston, it is a comic strip Dream and a clever one at that. It was fresh Australian air after Hamlet is all I can say.

The festival theatre programme while not having works on the scale and originality of Brook's Mahabharatta or the Theatre Repere's The Dragon's Trilogy nevertheless provided splendid and varied theatre. If you saw Archaos and Kathakali, the Dream, Whale Nation, Marat Sade, Bacula's Pig or any combination of the above you did more than all right. Just as you would have with Ali Akbar Khan, Peter Schreier's Die Winterreise, the Lyon Ballet, the Frida Kahlo exhibition, Kronos playing Istvan Marta's Doom, the Kosh, or if you sat with 22,000 of your fellow South Australians at Tosca. In fact it's enough to make your pancreas tired just thinking about it.

"Festival" The Adelaide Review, No.75, April, 1990, p.30.

Off the Wall

Published: 1990-05-01 *Adelaide Festival*

Archaos Wayville Showgrounds

Any display of pyrotechnics depends on precision and planning, and *Archaos*, Cirque Revolutionaire from France, has an especially fearful symmetry to it. What makes this show remarkable is the intelligence that drives it - hardly a gesture or joke is without reverberation, every sign is significant. *Archaos* offers many signs for the times.

Not that we are talking dry semiotics here. Stunt riders hurling 44 gallon drums, vandals with chainsaws, pyromaniacs and menacing clowns, spin in and out of a circus ring that reeks and rattles with internal combustion. Like the truck in Spielberg's *Duel*, the very machinery is on the rampage and the centre cannot hold.

This has its own exhilaration. Circus has always offered danger and Archaos performers fuel the reckless wishes of their audiences. No lingering drum rolls, no hushed silences, they fly pell-mell into the thick of things - their carelessness becomes ours too. This is the theatre of cruelty with a monkey wrench in its hand.

But there is counterpoint also. The ambling jongleur with an umbrella takes a shower in the middle of the mayhem, a circus hand, like one of Shakespeare's rude mechanicals, shyly joins the trapeze act and then cannot contain his own celebrity. Contortionists in glasswear perform with lyrical, vulnerable grace, while flowers are sniffed and exchanged in the rites of traditional clowning. If some of it looks like Beckett, it is because this is where it came from in the first place.

Propelled by incendiary guitar riffs and sinuous reed lines, the Archaos company flounce, scowl, smile and shrug at an audience that hardly knows where to look next. The pace is hectic, the changes swift and the meanings pile up relentlessly. A juggler hounds his partner like a Pozzo to Lucky, the stiltman's tango with the lady monocyclist turns to murderous frenzy.

No aestheticised fetishism here, rather, a procession of black images are unleashed like vice figures while the pure-in-heart scamper up into the ropes, woodsprites waiting for a storm to pass. Intensely, theatrical - the fire-eating scene explodes into a Meyerholdian foundry with angle grinders and rotating dervishes. And, imbued with a simple lyricism, *Archaos* acknowledges the double self in harmless, fearless celebration. Appropriately this production has been assisted by Circus Oz whose radical vision, like that of the splendid *Archaos*, has done much to restore to us an elemental theatre with the power to amaze.

"Off the Wall" *The Adelaide Review*, No.74, March, 1990, p.32.

Velo Theatre

Published: 1992-02-01 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Enveloppes et Deballage Cottage Theatre

Velot Theatre consists of director Tania Castaing and actor Charlot Lemoine and between them they construct tales of whimsy and imagination. In Enveloppes et Deballages- wrappings and unwrappings- they create what they call a `theatre of objects.'

Lemoine is a dreamy postman with a bicycle loaded with parcels. Amidst a hubbub of bird twitterings, cat yowls and what have you, he discovers smoke coming from a huge cardboard container. When he opens it he reveals a jungle landscape complete with puffing volcano. In amongst the paper mache undergrowth he finds rubber frogs, mechanical birds, a dragon with eyes that glow in the dark and a remote-controlled jeep full of explorers in pith helmets.

Velo use a wacky array of kitsch toys and gizmos- and a heap of undelivered mail- to tell a tall tale of a bird and a dragon who leave the jungle, cross a sea of blue cellophane and end up in a circus. This is the wonderfully daggy theatre of anti-illusion. Velo are fresh and inventive- and, while they sound like kids' stuff, it's all part and parcel of the fun.

Murray Bramwell

"Velo is French for a bundle of fun ." Four stars.

The Advertiser, February 28, 1992.

The Germanic Players

Published: 1992-02-16 *Adelaide Fringe · Theatre*

Die Verwandlung by Franz Kafka

Tandanya Theatre Until February 28.

Kafka's Metamorphosis is a creepy fable of modern angst. Gregor Samsa wakes up to find he has turned into an insect, his boss fires him and his family grow resentful that he's no longer bringing home the bacon. The story shows the cruelty of the outside world mirrored within the toxic confines of the family.

The Germanic Players are from the University of Melbourne and their German language production, Die Verwandlung is directed by Tim Mehigan. Undoubtedly the process of adaption and textual study has been a valuable one for the participants but the result is not satisfying theatre. The harshly grotesque nature of Kafka's story is uncertainly handled as the production wavers between low key naturalism and sort-of expressionism.

Director Mehigan tries a bit of everything- projection screens, red and blue washes of light, even dance interludes between the acts. The effect is a mush of styles and a lack of focus. The pace is perilously slow and the relationships between characters are inadequately established. Caroline Webster and Brian Griffin give sturdy performances as the Mother and Father and Kristin Giles creates good physical detail as Gregor. I just wish she hadn't died with her legs in the air.

Murray Bramwell.

"German language version of Kafka's Metamorphosis needs more changes yet." Two Stars.

Adelaide Advertiser, February 16, 1992.

Festival Smalls

Published: 1992-03-01 *Adelaide Festival*

Figurentheater Triangel Metamorphosis

Theatre de la Marmaille/ Teatro dell'Angolo Promised Land

Rough Magic Theatre Bat the Father, Rabbit the Son

Velo Theatre Enveloppes et Deballages

Reviewed by Murray Bramwell

Sprinkled throughout the theatre program are a number of smaller productions, one and two-handers which are the bonbons in the Festival's own version of the Fringe. These shows are mostly sixty minutes long, often twilight performances and all with broad appeal.

The festival organisers already know from the success of the Phillippe Genty Company that Adelaide audiences go mad for visual fantasy theatre, especially, in the case of Genty, when it is tinged with just the right amount of prurience and sentiment.

The season at the Cottage Theatre opened with the show by the Dutch duo Figurentheater Triangel. Henk Boerwinkel's marionettes and puppets have a grim vocabulary drawn from nightmare and phobia. An angst-ridden figure buries his face in his hands, a crow appears and steals a baby from its wizened guardian. A giant reaches down and terrifies some mortal only to be brought down himself, bitten by a huge hairy spider. A head separates from a sleeping body, snaking into the air with vertebrae attached. A cyclops pulls out his eye, screws it into a camera and takes a picture of the audience.

Boerwinkel comes out of the tiny booth that is his operating HQ to have a chat with the audience. He likes marionettes, he says, because they have indirect movement. He then goes back inside to indirectly rain down more creepy images -rats, guilloutines, and a series of struggles between Punchinella and the unseen puppet master. One particularly grotesque image has a figure unbandaging another's head to reveal a brain which is then removed and uncoiled. These transformations and metamorphoses may owe something to Ovid but more to Dali or the darker moments of Henson and Oz. It is an absorbing show but despite the descriptive captions - reality, fantasy and so on- it has the effect of a dream which is beyond unraveling.

At the Arts Theatre the collaborative venture between Theatre de la Marmaille of Montreal and Teatro dell'Angolo of Turin entitled Promised Land is less engaging. Despite high production values such as the pin sharp synthesised sound and the effectiveness of the acting area - defined by the curtain being lowered to about four feet from the stage, creating a cinemascope effect. Arms, legs, occasionally whole bodies appear as part of a cavalcade of activity from primeval time to the present. A flat rock is the constant factor, reminder of the endurance of the natural world against the transience of human endeavour. The show is an uninterestingly earnest piece. The History of the World Parts I and II it seemed- with a lot of technical skill but very little resonance. Promised Land does not fulfil its promise.

The Rough Theatre Company - for this festival at least- comprises solo writer and performer Donal Kelly. His show Bat the Father Rabbit the Son is a discursive portrait of the artist as a young rabbit. Bullied by the ghost of Bat, a windbag father very like Dedalus senior, or John Joyce for that matter, Rabbit is a middle-aged trucking tycoon unsafe from the psychic past or the economic predations of the present.

Kelly succeeds in being disconcertingly rabbity and inhabits a range of characters -few of them easy, on themselves or others. He creates a fooking rich torrent of Dublin patois and there are some majestic passages on life in the Liffee -sewage and mackerel and all the philosophies between. Bat the Father is an engaging piece but needs twenty minutes nipped out of it. Often the fine blather creates more texture than pattern and some fascinating possibilities are short-circuited.

The Velo company deal in the theatre of objects and a strange little world they inhabit. Enveloppes and Deballages - wrappings and unwrappings- is an eccentric little bijou about a postman who starts investigating the parcels he is delivering. One carton breaks open to reveal a jungle full of frogs and snakes and dragons with battery-operated eyes. The daggy props -wind-up drummers, rubber sharks and remote controlled jeeps- are all incorporated into a narrative that flies over volcanoes and crosses a blue cellophane sea to find a circus. Velo's director Tania Castaing and performer Charlot Lemoine give new meaning to the word inconsequential. It is whimsical fantasy for all. Some may find it too fey for its own good, but its good-natured anti-illusionist pranking is hard to resist.

The Adelaide Review, No.100, March 1992 p.33. ÜÜÜÜ 02/27/9202/27/92/

Adelaide Festival - Sadness and Merry Whistling

Published: 1992-03-01 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Uncle Vanya by Anton Chekhov State Theatre of Lithuania Scott Theatre

Reviewed by Murray Bramwell

Accustomed as we are to mixed styles and hybrid forms, their presence in the plays of Anton Chekhov can still surprise, even alarm us. Few playwrights have had their work subjected to such a variety of interpretations. There have been faithfully naturalistic readings of Chekhov, melancholy, languid ones, giddy comic ones, proto-revolutionary versions, even determinedly erotic ones. Chekhov himself was forever signalling that his intentions were complex and multiple. In the case of Uncle Vanya, Stanislavsky, his often-perplexed collaborator, recalled the playwright's observation of Astrov - "He whistles. Listen. He whistles ! Uncle Vanya is crying and Astrov whistles." How is this so, asks Stanislavsky, himself cast in the role of Astrov -"sadness, hopelessness and merry whistling ?" But when he tried the combination, it worked.

The State Theatre Company of Lithuania, under the direction of Eimuntas Nekrosius, knows all about sadness, hopelessness and merry whistling. Their Uncle Vanya is a long way from Stanislavsky -as far, you might say, as Lithuania from Moscow- but it is, unmistakably, a triumph of intelligence and theatrical flair. Instead of palely loitering around the samovar these characters have a hectic, often alcoholic energy. Here is a lively household, full of beans and eccentricity. There is passion in their conversation even if it sounds as though it should presided over by a mad hatter.

Astrov is fervent about the forests and full of a doctor's grief for medical failures, Telyegin, better known as Waffles, clowns about dabbing his jowls with perfume, Sonya, in plaits worthy of Rapunzel, displays a sharp intelligence which makes her unrequited love for Astrov even more painfully absurd, and Marya, mother of Vanya, is an old dragon who slaps her forty-seven-year-old son in the face and sulks until he apologises.

In amongst these histrionics comes Yelena, leggy and fatale in leather tunic and riding britches, her hair slicked and spiked with a peacock feather - modishly modern, woman of the future, two decades ahead of her time. On the other hand, Serebryakov, her fellow cosmopole, looks like something Ralph Steadman might have dreamed up, parading a Japanese umbrella and tortuously performing the quintessential silly walk. This is the prat for whom Vanya and Sonya have slaved for twenty years.

Nekrosius has quite uncannily found the truth of Uncle Vanya by means of comic grotesquery. Everyone is revving with futile energy. The men are forever lifting doorstops as if they were dumbbells. Between scenes the servants skid among the furniture like demons, or, shickered and staggering, serve drinks with mocking derision. This is a society on the skids, the centre isn't holding and, revelations, surely, are at hand. Focussing on Astrov's sense of environmental apocalypse, Nekrosius has the characters wrap themselves in wolfskins bespeaking their loss of vitality and nerve- this is most evident in the final scene when Astrov makes his wounded departure and Vanya, in extremis, is given desolate consolation from Sonya. Having been propelled by a dark and sensual satire, the play concludes at a point of extraordinary pathos.

The performances are splendidly judged and richly funny. Kostas Smoriginas as Astrov, intently showing Yelena his maps the size of postage stamps, is as deadpan as a frame from Glen Baxter. Vidas Petkevicius's Vanya has a sardonic dignity and Vladas Bagdonas and Juozas Pocius devise eerie comedy for Serebryakov and Waffles. Dalia Storyk finds in Yelena the right mix of coquetry and dutiful denial and Dalia Overaite's Sonya is refreshingly red-blooded.

The ensemble acting is playful and inventive -never more so when the household poses for a photograph while singing the slave chorus from Nabucco. The lighting, by Romualdas Treinys, is outstanding, allowing everything from honey tones to smartly managed melodrama. The organ themes and hypnotic polka figures in Faustas Latenas's music insinuate themselves through the proceedings as insistently as Chekhov's own stage instructions and Nadiezda Gultiajeva's designs are striking and functional - the set consisting of two large horizontal crosses and an unpedantic but shrewdly furnished open plan acting area. The costumes, similarly in period, are wittily stylised.

Despite disconcerting freight delays, the Lithuanian State Theatre Company opened in the Scott Theatre with a stunning performance. The simultaneous translation provided through individual headsets is deft and unobtrusive, it is like a spoken subtitle and is an ideal adjunct to the performance. This valuable innovation will undoubtedly increase the audience for foreign language performances. The Festival has hardly begun and already with Uncle Vanya it has given us a treasure.

The Adelaide Review, March, 1992. p.32.

Funerals and Circuses

Published: 1992-04-01 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre · Music*

by Roger Bennett Music by Paul Kelly Magpie Theatre, South Australia Director: Steve Gration Assistant Director: Kaarin Fairfax Designer: Kathryn Sproul Choreographer: Debra Batton Lighting: Laraine Wheeler Cast: Wayne Anthoney, Roger Bennett, Robert Crompton, Fille Dusseljee, Francis Greenslade, Michael Harris, Nick Hope, Paul Kelly, Kate Roberts, Mandi Sandilands, Lillian Sansbury, Simone Tur.

Rarely does a theatrical work speak to its audience as directly and potently as *Funerals and Circuses*. In the midst of the Adelaide Festival, with all its attendant sense of cultural consumption, is a play that is about our immediate reality. In the same week that ABC-TV created fierce public debate by screening *Cop It Sweet*, a documentary on police attitudes towards Aboriginals, and Mandawuy Yunupingu, lead singer of Yothu Yindi, was refused service in the Catani Bar in Melbourne's St. Kilda, Funerals and Circuses presents us with a vivid account of racism in a South Australian community.

This play has not come out of nowhere. It continues and builds on a core of black writing in recent years begun by the powerful witness in Jack Davis's work, plays by Bob Maza and Eva Johnson and the widespread and well-merited success of *Bran Nue Dae*. But *Funerals and Circuses* has learnt well from its antecedents and the process of its development has been a particularly creative one.

The setting is a small unidentified town where the lives of whites and Aboriginals are in daily, intimate encounter. This contributes much to the intensity of events - Nona, the daughter of the local cop Graham Royal, has married an Aboriginal, Ben Bean, which alienates not only the local whites but also Ben's daughter Jessie. Ben's sister Rose has a son, Joseph, a spirited youth who is often in conflict with official and unofficial white authority. Running the local bar on the best apartheid principles is Corey, while Pam McMahon and her racist tearaway son Kev operate the shop. Next door at the garage is Tony, friend to Ben and Joseph and therefore suspect as far as the white residents are concerned. The play, as the title suggests, begins with a wedding and ends in grief but it richly explores the attitudes and fears of the characters and in so doing brings the abstraction of racism into human terms.

Opening in promenade fashion, the crowd is invited to a madcap wedding celebrated with Paul Kelly's nimble song *Until Death Do Them Part*. Having established a sense of frivolity, the vehemence of the racism -expressed when the guests are refused a nuptial drink at the local - cuts deep. The local cop is feckless, the white youths of the town homicidally out of control. A shadow falls over events when Rose fears her son Christopher is missing and Jessie decides to head out to a dreaming site just out of town. The play threads a complicated plot artfully, creating suspense and tension in the process.

Richard, a cousin from town, introduces a star-crossed theme when he quotes Romeo and Julietta Kev's disillusioned girlfriend Julie. This theme of prejudice and vengeance imbues the play. It is the young who suffer most terribly - and the play does not stint in saying so.

Directors Steve Gration and Kaarin Fairfax have drawn fine performances particularly from the less experienced performers. There is a truth to their work which is powerfully eloquent. Writer Roger Bennett brings a shrewd comedy to the part of Ben Bean while Robert Crompton and Michael Harris are crucially convincing as Joseph and Richard. We experience vividly the vindictiveness with which they are treated. The desperate racism of Corey (Nick Hope) and Kev McMahon (Francis Greenslade) serve a key dramatic role in the play and Greenslade, in particular, contributes one of the finest stage performances. Wayne Anthoney as the cop skilfully epitomises the kind of easy-going approach to law enforcement which serves racism best while Lillian Sansbury and Simone Tur as Rose and Jessie, black women violated and betrayed by random violence, give performances which are precise, eloquent and harrowing in their detail.

Funerals and Circuses is unsparing in its depiction of injustice but it is also imbued with a radiant spirit. This is not in the form of easy sentiment but a sense of the unquenchable vitality of Aboriginal society and the careful protocol which unites it. Director Gration has maintained workable balances in the production , aided by a practical and appropriately detailed set, one of Kathryn Sproul's best. The store fronts and shanties, petrol pumps and desert settings give specificity to the narrative and anchor the drama in an identifiable locale. Finally, mention must be made of Paul Kelly, gently offbeat as Tony and a vital contributor to the success of the show. His music - lyrical, slyly memorable and always shaped and integrated with the action - brings a kind of joy to the production. *Funerals and Circuses* is not an easy account of our times. It presents much to feel grief and shame for. But the simple gifts of Kelly's Finale Song offer a kind of benediction that promises better. Not just because we wish it, but because good people have already striven for it.

"Funerals and Circuses" *Lowdown*, Vol.14, No.2, April 1992, p.55.

Tankard Brimming with Invention

Published: 1994-02-04 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Two Feet Meryl Tankard Australian Dance Theatre Created, Directed and Performed by Meryl Tankard Visual Design by Regis Lansac Costume Design by Dianne Bridson Lighting Design by Toby Harding Assistant Director Peggy Watson The Playhouse, Adelaide Festival Centre 10 February

Reviewed by Murray Bramwell

It is not putting it too strongly to say that Meryl Tankard has been exhilarating audiences in Adelaide in the past year. Since taking over as Artistic Director of the now eponymous Australian Dance Theatre, Tankard, and her associate Regis Lansac, have taken the company from strength to strength. Performed at Womadelaide, on the lawns of Botanic Park, her whimsical Court of Flora immediately attracted attention for the Meryl Tankard ADT. Some of the repertoire -Nuti and Kikimora for instance- had already been seen elsewhere and been warmly received. But works like the free-spirited Furioso and the superbly judged Songs With Mara represent new triumphs.

Her latest solo performance, Two Feet, is by no means a new work. In fact she first presented it at the Expo in 1988. Since then Two Feet has had plenty of legs - seasons in Melbourne in the festival in 1992 and in Sydney in November last year.

But its placement in the Tankard ADT season in Adelaide seems particularly apt, giving as it does yet another glimpse of the range of her confident invention. After the ensemble's youthful unruliness in Furioso and the lyrical erotics of Mara (including memorable work by Tankard herself), the focus on Tankard as soloist suddenly seems appropriate.

Especially since Two Feet is such a quirky blend of Unreliable Memoir and tragic biography. The two feet in question refer to the four feet of Mepsie and Olga. Mepsie is Tankard as Smiley, a little vegemite from 1957, discovering the pleasures and mocking the pretensions of dance teaching in Australia. Olga is Olga Spessivtzeva, leading dancer with Diaghilev's Ballet Russes, who toured Australia in 1936. By the mid-Forties she suffered a nervous collapse that kept her institutionalised until 1963. Olga's morbid preoccupation with perfecting the role of Giselle led her to become, like her character, a prisoner of the dance.

Tankard's opening vignette as a doll revolving in a music box establishes the thread of implicit criticism that runs through the work- that the study of ballet and its strictures while embodying the classical ideal can , like Chinese footbinding, become merely a cruel and disempowering fetish. In contrast to Olga's exercises at the barre, emphasised by Regis Lansac's projections of classical columns, we have Mepsie, Tankard as a young fry, learning the mysteries of the Shrimping Dance.

While Mepsie learns to tango in her mother's banana boat high heels, Olga is moving further into the black forests. Mepsie's concern about how to tie her hair at the eisteddfod is counterpointed by Olga's mad Giselle. The two become entwined when Mepsie describes her love of torture, the exercises that will make her a perfect dancer. While this is comically portrayed it has a satiric, and in Olga's case, a literal truth to it that is both questioned and vindicated by Mepsie's frantic performance of the sacrifice from Stravinsky's Rite of Spring.

Tankard's blend of comedy, pathos and satire is not always clearly managed. Olga's Ballet Russes style is ambiguously campy at times although there is no doubting the impact of the Finale.

After Tankard has sashayed in blue satins through Handel's Largo, delivered a startling sketch of Mepsie's Christmas Dinner- regurgitating a few secrets of the compleat dancer's diet plan, and fluttered as a rose-coloured Pavlova nymph, she returns as Olga.

The extended finale, suffused with the painfully haunting theme from Giselle and the beautifully-paced slide sequences from Lansac, creates that distinctive Tankard after-image. The projections - of stringy birches and Magritte-like brick hourglasses- are reflected in a pool of water that covers the Playhouse stage. Red roses are strewn everywhere. Olga in a knee length white tutu struggles to perform at the barre, water skitters and plashes and we witness a soul drowning in an inch of water. Such a scene is a bee's whisker from de trop - and there are dance afficionados who say it IS too much. Well not me. Meryl Tankard and Regis Lansac (and co-designers Dianne Bridson and Toby Harding) have real confidence and flair. Their work is so lucidly realised it is a pleasure to watch.

The Financial Review, February 4, 1994. (?)

Like Cherries for Peaches

Published: 1994-03-01 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Tomoe Shizune and Hakutobo Union Hall

Reviewed by Murray Bramwell

It is generally agreed that the first butoh performance was Forbidden Colours, based on the works of Mishima and presented by Tatsumi Hijikata at a Japanese dance festival in 1959. From there this eclectic dance drama form has been interpreted by a variety of companies and soloists. Some, such as Kazua Ohno, Sankai Juku and Byakko Sha have been visiting Australian festivals since the mid 1980s.

Hakutobo -which means the White Peaches- includes founding member Yoko Ashikawa who worked extensively with Hijikata from 1967 until his death in 1985. The opening section of the company's program was performed by Yoko Ashikawa and director and composer Tomoe Shizune. Entitled Sakura no Odori (A Dance of Cherries) it contains movement devised by Hijikata himself.

While butoh has come to mean many different things exponents all describe it as a homage to the body, an exploration of the body down to the single strand of hair. It is also interesting to consider connections with European movements in the late Fifties in particular the Theatre of the Absurd.

As they come blinking into the light seemingly shaking off the ash of some cataclysm Hakutobo seem quite Beckettian in their elemental innocence. The movement in both Sakura no Odori and the main work Renyo is meticulously, mesmerically slow. The silences are enormous, every footfall, every knee crack is audible. The whited faces are impassive but also totally expressive, canvases for looks of consternation, curiosity and at times a terror as all-encompassing as that missing Scream from Mr Munch.

Against a backdrop of shredded fabric the company are dressed in dusty smocks except for what I take to be the jizo figure, the guardian deity of children, who wears scarlet. Takuro Osaka's lighting - single spots, sidelighting and great washes of light over the entire stage- beautifully directs the dancers' work as they appear in pairs,trios, fours and also as a full ensemble. As with other butoh companies the key to their accessibility is in the music. Tomoe Shizune's layered synths belong absolutely with Oldfield and Vangelis or, if you prefer, Phillip Glass and Robert Schroeder. The repeated musical figures are modal, harmonic. At times they verge on the banal but they lessen the strangeness of the performers. Instead the music highlights the fragility and the tenderness of the work.

The Hakutobo program is an esoteric one with narrative lines and cultural references that are opaque to the uninformed Western audience. But the sense of human community, the almost fetal gentleness and the indescribable yearning in the performances is profoundly satisfying. What did Blake say in his Auguries- Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand and Eternity in an hour. Make that ninety minutes.

The Adelaide Review, No.125, March 1994, p.27

White Masque

Published: 1994-03-01 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

A Cheery Soul by Patrick White

Queensland Theatre Company Her Majesty's

Reviewed by Murray Bramwell

On the slowly spinning revolve Bill Haycock's design could be a retro-chic lunch place. Patrick White's meticulously described kitchen scene, in cream and red chrome and formica, once embodied the Australian Ugliness, the bland vulgarity of that early Sixties suburban Sydney he lumped together as Sarsaparilla. Now it is aestheticised, wry down-market decor, unable to harm or threaten- as it did White and the young male personae of his plays- those poets and sensitives buried alive in material comfort and spiritual dearth.

The satire in Act I of A Cheery Soul still registers. The Custances live like Dagwood and Blondie, a life of petty habit and compulsive domestic hygiene. Jennifer Flowers is nicely underplayed as the wife waiting for the invention of Spray and Wipe while Max Cullen, taking his Ham Funeral performance back a few notches, is weirdly generic as the fussy, denatured husband. Into their lives walks Miss Docker, savagely based on White's acquaintance Miss Scott. Miss Falstaff, Signora Gloriosus, Mrs Malaprop, the Moonie Ponds Edna, she is the busybody, the invader of Personal Space, the blurter of confidences, the reminder that our lives are not our own.

A Cheery Soul is a bitter work and far from straight-forward in structure. After Miss Docker's disastrous sojourn in the Custance house she moves awkwardly- as does the play- to the Sundown Home for Old People. From there we get a series of set pieces, vignettes of her with the ladies in the home, brittle as teacups, politely parked in the twilight zone. Elsewhere Miss Docker breaks the spirit and belief of the tortured cleric, mockingly named Wakeman.

Director Neil Armfield, after his gaudily expressionist version of The Ham Funeral has similarly heightened White's symbolist reverie into a kind of gothic pantomime. His staging is spacious -in Victorian black back-dropped with funereal draperies. It is like Poe, or Munch on a larger scale. The whisperings of the ladies, the choric repetitions, the tetchiness of the not-yet dead forms a decor for the raucous Miss Docker.

Carole Skinner's cheery solo is well-sustained. Her Miss Docker is a stock figure, a fixed entity whose effectiveness comes from its location in Armfield's operatic vision. Geoff Morrell is nicely stylised as Wakeman and Jennifer Blocksidge excellent as the genteel Miss Lillie. The ensemble work has clarity and precision and Nigel Levings' lighting is yet again first-rate.

Neil Armfield has taken the disunities of White's play and amplified them into a visually commanding work. But unlike The Ham Funeral he has altered the proportions of the work. A Cheery Soul is an uncomfortable piece, gnarly and unresolved like its author. It is almost unreasonable in its rancour. It is also passionate in its denunciation of the time that produced it. Armfield's directorial gifts have perhaps been too much abundance in this production. The fluency that he has found is admirable but the play is now an innocuous icon of another epoch. Rather than pleasing the eye Patrick White might have preferred that it stick in the throat instead.

The Adelaide Review, No.125, March, 1994, p.24.

A Kyogen Falstaff: The Braggart Samurai

Published: 1994-03-11 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Theatre A Kyogen Falstaff: The Braggart Samurai

Adaptation: Yasunari Takahashi Director: Mansaku Nomura Suke-emon Horato (Falstaff): Mansaku Nomura Tara Kaja (Bardolph): Takeshi Nomura Jiro Kaja (Pistol): Haruo Tsukizaki Yakbei (Ford): Mannosuke Nomura Omatsu (Mistress Ford): Yukio Ishida Otake (Mistress Page): Shichisaku Ogawa Koken (Stage Assistant): Ryosaku Nomura Fue (flute): Takayuki Isso Taiko (drum): Hitoshi Sakuraoi.

The Playhouse

Sir John Falstaff is Shakespeare's big comic success. Hot with appetite, ripe with laughter, he is ego made flesh- and a force of life itself. Banish plump Jack and you banish all the world, he admonishes the young Prince Hal. And when the big man does get his marching orders in Henry V Part II it generates such sentiment that it almost tilts the play. Fortunately Shakespeare was canny enough to write one further play as vehicle for his reckless weightwatcher- the citizen comedy, The Merry Wives of Windsor.

With its vivacious good humour, its reversals of power and its gags at fat Jack's expense, Merry Wives provides ideal material for Yasunari Takahashi's adaptation to kyogen, the fifteenth century Japanese comic form which literally translates as `word crazy.' Performed by an all male cast and accompanied by two musicians on stage, The Braggart Samurai is proof of the universality, not only of the character, but of the comic intrigues of the plot. Suke-emon Horata, the big-bellied sake soak has once more run out of money. His plan is to woo two matrons, Omatsu and Otake, in the hope of coaxing some yen as well as some yearnings but, warned by his servants, they contrive to turn the tables instead. Omatsu's jealous husband also gets tangled in events -to the evident relish of all.

Set on an empty stage except for the traditional kyogen pine tree at the back, the play is beautifully spare and fresh. There are minimal props- the jealous husband wields a long knife at one stage, and dodders in with a stick at another - and make-up, except for Horato's huge fringed beard and red cheeks, is virtually non-existent. Scene changes are heralded by the musicians' chanting, drumbeats and shrill notes on a flute. The actors' movement is both disciplined and playfully nimble. Mansuka Nomura, as Horata, almost floats as he bounds about the stage and the scene when he is carried in a laundry basket- depicted only by a pole hefted between his two servants, with the fully visible Horata bumping along in the middle- is astonishingly apt and fluent.

But the Braggart Samurai is more than skilful pantomime. The text, available in surtitles with the production, is unexpectedly quirky in its wit. Takahashi enjoys plenty of intertextual jokes at the bard's expense. There is reference to `some philosophical coward' declaiming to be or not to be, and the variant - frailty thy name is wife. There are allusions to Romeo and Juliet and even to the witches' doggerel in Macbeth. The language is generally boisterous and jokey as when one of the servants who keeps serving up homilies to meet every occasion suddenly complains that he has run out of old sayings.

Running just sixty minutes- an extension of the usually shorter kyogen form- The Braggart Samurai is richly funny and full of verbal surprise. And while the women and servants get their laughs, Horata, the lord of misrule is not down for long. His promises to reform are the thinnest thing about him. The first to the banquet and the last to the battlefield he is a sook and bounder- and unmistakably a part of everyone. All the world's a bit of a joke, he crows as he dances his final song, and all the men and women merely jesters. Plump Jack would drink to that one.

The Australian, March 11, 1994.

Zero to Naught

Published: 1994-04-01 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

My Mathematics Rose English

Festival Tent Memorial Drive

Reviewed by Murray Bramwell

The name's Charlie and, obviously, I'm a horse. I've just been in Adelaide for the Festival. I wasn't too sure about it all myself. It was my agent's idea really. Good for your CV he said. You need to diversify, get into the arts more. But that's what he said when he found that other play for me- Equus.

Well, anyway I'm back doing theatre and frankly it hasn't been up to much. It's this naff show called My Mathematics. I'm working with this Rose English lady. She's nice enough but really I think she's a born soloist. I don't think she's used to collaboration. You know, ensemble work. I said to her- sure, this is criticism but its constructive criticism. I'm on your side babe. I'm not your babe, she said testily, and what's more the hats are staying.

I said it's not the hats. This isn't about hats, the sombreros or even those coney things. This is about larger issues. I mean, what's your premise I keep asking. So she talked about her notion of the Arena, the interface between the performer and the audience, that it's a voyeuristic, co-dependent thing. That it must be ruptured and questioned. We must revel, she said, in the gap between understanding and bafflement. So that's why I have all this random narrative, she said, and disconcerting audience participation with people getting rubbed with my eyelashes or being asked to cut them off with scissors. It's challenging the habituation of the theatre. You've got to have courage Charlie, she said, and, if you don't mind me saying, some vision.

Well that got me. When you've done Equus you can talk to me about vision I said. I said we're talking tired and fatuous here. Old haddock dressed up as a new idea. Or maybe not much of an idea at all. I know my Wittgenstein, I'm no slouch with the Frankfurt Boys but I still don't know what the Foucault you are on about. And the mathematics. Is zero a number ? All that zero through to nought bollocks. My number theory's no great shakes but Rose I said, that sounds like rhetoric to me, gesture. It's not amounting to anything. And that whimsy in Act One I said, talking to your chaise longue, the cod stuff with the accordionist, it's like a forty five minute Glen Baxter cartoon. It's sort of funny but you can't sustain it. The people won't sit for it, I said. Well Charlie, that's where you come in, she said in a tone I didn't much like.

I've done a lot of tent work in my time. Showy I admit - but spangled for good reason, I've been pushed about, any actor has. But that stuff in Act Two really got on my tits if you'll excuse my French. Tense and dense she calls me- well that's the pot calling the kettle if I may say. Look, I tried to humour her- undoing the knots, carrying that dumb little basket. But I draw the line at the silk blanket and that frigging hat. And all that round and round business, the aria arena and so on. I was getting to the end of my tether. And the singing. Where are we, we are not in Wembley, we are not in Radio City. You are not wrong.

The only thing for it was to try and ginger things up a bit, you know- some Artaud. Biting the front row. I'll give her theatre of cruelty I thought - and so she gets ratty and starts shoving sugar at me. What kind of entertainment's that ? Handing around the sugar went out with vaudeville. Did you see anyone eating sugar in Equus ? So there I am dying - the crowd's groaning, the show's going down the toilet and when I try something a bit creative she resorts to all this impro stuff, trying to upstage me. I feel tremendously soothed, she keeps saying to me and then she bends down and I'm supposed to spank her with the horse whip. There she is with her bum sticking out of her costume and I'm supposed to do the honours. I've got a lot to sort out with the mens' group when I get home.

I've talked to the agent about this. He's on probation for a bit. The discussions with the Wuhan acrobats didn't develop into anything. They said my Mandarin wasn't good enough. Which is fair enough, it isn't. Besides I'm sick of ensembles. I'm working on my own show. I'm finalising the grant application right now. It's based on another artist of the theatre who was ignored and forgotten - just like Miss English's Rosita Clavell. Another misunderstood Palomino who didn't get a chance to express himself. This one's for you Ed. I'm calling it The Thousand Eyes of Wilbur Post.

The Adelaide Review, April 1994.

Womentous

Published: 1995-03-01 *WOMADelaide*

Womadelaide 1995 Botanic Park

Reviewed by Murray Bramwell

Friday night. Six o'clock. Entering Botanic Park from Frome Road. There is a steady procession of people -in groups, comfortably solo, wheeling bicycles, ferrying their kids, carrying various clobber for the first phase of a three day picnic. The queues run smoothly, tickets are checked , everyone is easy. Pick up your free program and you're in.

Now in Adelaide for a third time, Womadelaide has an established script. We know what to expect and that's what we get. The old firm, led by Rob Brookman, Colin Koch, UK Womad's Thomas Brooman and many more, have created a sense of the effortless which belies the attention to detail (and sheer slog) behind the event. The layout is familiar - two mainstage areas and the tent (the favourite for many) for workshops and other musical bijoux. The food and drink stalls serving the multitude include the best known names in Adelaide's Asian, Middle-Eastern, European,vegan and ocker gourmet victuals. The displays and craft vendors represent the postmodern caravanserai of our late century. At Womadelaide, time is not linear, it is multidimensional. Unreconstructed hippies mingle with goths, neo-punks, hip hopsters, yuppies, folkies, green workerists, rayban capitalists, management samurai and a large crowd just trying to stay cool and have a good time. Rarely is our social variety arrayed as visibly, or as amiably.

And the word has got around. Twice the number of interstate registrations this time. Ticket sale targets were reached five hours before opening and an estimated fifteen thousand came through the gates on Friday alone. A matter for some cultural jubilation. And a further vindication of those Rob Brookman hunches, back in the 1992 Festival, that musical eclecticism had reached epidemic proportions and a festival such as Womad would be just the ticket.

It is entirely appropriate that Adelaide should secure this event - and that the country should look to us to host it- because, smaller centre though we are, there is considerable musical nous here, sustained by dedicated record shops, a vigorous live music scene and a supportive music press, both mainstream and on the street. It has been said before, but Adelaide has produced some of the country's best. If we pay some systematic attention to these things we could become a postindustrial Weimar like Seattle.

The Womadelaide program is denser this year, with fewer repeat performances. This time the emphasis is more on the M than the D in the acronym- World of Music and Dance. There is an evenness in the program - fewer standout acts but plenty to like. And, arriving into the green expanses of Botanic Park, monument to nineteenth century public benevolence, who better to be hearing than the splendid vocals of Vika and Linda . Paul Kelly's Hard Love . Followed by others from the Bull Sisters' increasingly widely-known debut album - I Know Where to Go, These Hands (dedicated to their Mum) and We Started a Fire. A highlight is the Etta James standard, Something's Got a Hold of Me, their alternating blues solos enough to make your skin shiver. Thank you for clapping, they pucker, and the band- a trio including Black Sorrows guitarist, Wayne Burt - roars into their new gospel release, Up Above My Head I Hear Music in the Air.

With more than fifty performances over three days the ticket price at Womadelaide represents less than two dollars a set. On that calculation the Leningrad Cowboys are certainly worth a dollar twelve. Eight strong, and thumping everything from an accordion to a military drum the Cowboys are a triumph of hairdressing,with arcing quiffs rhyming with scimitar winklepickers and , for the two go-go lady persons, B.52's with a grecian urn motif. The playlist is psychotic in its diversity- Lets Stick Together, No-one Like My Tooka (?) The Sabre Dance, LA Woman and their tour de force, the old Ryan twins hit - Eloise. Thank you very many, they gurgle in mock Boris accents while the crowd sways like corn. We love you because you are so rich and healthy looking.

Geoffrey Oryema is one of the happy returns from previous festivals and this time he has a three piece band , once more led by guitar incendiarist Jean-Pierre Alarcen. Oryema again manages to be magnificent - winning the crowd with his regal presence and an astute blend of indigenous African and richly produced pop. He plays songs from Exile and from his recent album Beat the Border. Among others, he meanders through The River - Paint me a picture, and let it flow. It flows- and so does Alarcen's superbly sinuous guitar.

The drawcard rock act for Womadelaide is The Cruel Sea who launch into a seventy five minute set with great commitment but not much real impact. They aren't helped by Stage One's harsh trebly mix - excruciating also for Sierra Maestra earlier in the night. Jim Rumour's virtuosic guitar lines- slides, fuzz, all the pedals- are often mangled although the rest of the band fare better. Lead singer Tex Perkins can't seem to settle into his task, unable to capitalise either on the size of the arena or the nature of the occasion. He toils through the familiar canon - It's All Right Because She Loves Me, and from the recent honeymoon- Naked Flame, Blame it on the Moon, Delivery Man and others. The band have a hard energy reminiscent of Sticky Fingers vintage Stones but Tex, for all his antics, can't get in close. Maybe he's meant to be a pub grokker. The faithful love him and the band play their spirited insrumentals. But out on the perimeter, the sound shredding our ears, Tex looks like a bird trapped in a window.

Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan closes the evening, under perfect stars, with a golden hour of his qawwali singing. Surrounded by a dozen singers and percussionists, Nusrat leads his consort through a maze of melodies, litanies and repetitions. It is like a sort of divine scat singing but so rich and satisfying to listen to that it can draw a whole paddockful of people into a peace that passeth, not only understanding ,but the midnight hour at Womad.

Saturday. It is hot to cook. Rafts of people follow the configurations of the shade, while the less inflammable gambol to the sounds of Tiddas, the Sunrize Band, Papa Wemba making a first stunning appearance, Justin Vali, Mouth Music, Christine Anu and Archie and Ruby.Performing only on the Saturday the Borderers play a popular set as does the American rap pioneer Gil Scott- Heron. His Amnesia Express begin half an hour late- the first and only time the trains don't run on time. With a gravelly drawl, Gil coos to the crowd. This Ain't Really Your Life (It's a Movie) -over and over to the groovy slap bass and Hendrix riffs of the band. The long ,hypnotic extemporisings put the pause button on the crowd as Gil skips to Winter in America and, his final funk frolic, Celebrate.

Deprived of a crowd becaue of the time mix-up, the Mutton Birds play to a select but very admiring few. Singer Don McGlashan sings songs reminiscent of Tom Rapp's Pearls Before Swine. A Thing Well Made satirises the gun trade, other, sweeter sentiments are heard with In My Room, Let Me In and in the lilting melodies of the final song, Anchor Me. The large turnout for ALT is all the more ironic because the trio - made up of Hothouse Flowers, Whites and Finns- turns out some very lovely harmonies for some very fatuous songs. The new age flubbiness of Mandala for example- and others too insipid to think about.

It was Jah Wobble's band who invaded the heart of Saturday night with a startling hour of Algerian, Asian and Carribean sound. Combining esoteric forms -including chanting, percussion and an undulating belly dancer- with a resonant, well balanced rock sound, the Invaders of the Heart are excitement itself. Building from a ten minute drum trio the band flowers into an extended version of Becoming More Like God which draws layers of synth, percussion and Justin Evans's magnificent guitar work, into a musical ragout which stuns the crowd. We'd love to play for yer for another five ars, roars bassist Jah, former alumnus of John Lydon's PiL, but there y'ar. Instead he blows a kiss into the mixing panel's echo loop. As Jah says, it's a big sincere show business kiss- from the bottom of me 'eart.

For their final appearance Nusrat and the boys take to Stage One for the last two hours of Saturday night- as the huge crowd sprawls on the cool grass, weary from the day's heat and the stimulation generated from more than two hundred musicians. This is the life. And certainly someone's god's plenty.

Sunday. Zap Mama, favourite for many, open the program followed by Kashtan and Bangarra Dance. In the milder conditions festival favouries Jah Wobble and the Invaders of the Heart return with an excellent facsimile of their previous set. Christine Anu is joined by various guests including, on her performance of My Island Home, David Bridie. A warmly received set. As is the second round by Mouth Music. Led by vocalist Jackie Joyce the band uses splashy dance rhythms to underlay the dreamy, elemental lyrics. Move On, Tomorrow, Forever to Travel and Colour of My Love - all from the Shorelife album- have the crowd gliding nicely to Stage One for shorter segments (too short) by Tanzanian Hukwe Zawose and Stella Chiweshe whose spare traditional musicmaking reminds us of the preponderance of electric sound in the festival. Adel Salameh and Krishnamurti Sridhar, on oud and sarod respectively, also perform superbly making us wish that they hadn't been programmed against Nusrat on Saturday night.

Archie and Ruby assemble fellow Nunga performers- the Sunrize Band, Rough Image, Bangarra and Christine Anu - for a statement of land rights solidarity before settling into performances of their best-known work - And the Children Came Back, Changes and others. Kate Ceberano, the grown-ups' Cruel Sea, brings in a snappy band and special guest Jean Paul Wabotai, for a popular but oddly discrepant show. Particularly strong is her version of the Rene Geyer song, Things Gonna Be Alright. Less so is Voice of Reason, a song quixotically bemoaning her undeniably MOR status. The lady surely doth protest too much.

After a second helping from Geoffrey Oryema the big blast finale goes to Papa Wemba. Leading his brilliantly tight six piece band and flanked by two women singers, the Zairean singer delights the crowd with vibrant, beaty African pop. Culled from his two Real World albums, Voyager and Emotion, Wemba's playlist, with the exception of a soulful solo, is geared to peak energy. The band works like a train and its almost Salif and Remmy again. Show Me the Way, Fa Fa Fa Fa Fa and more. Merci beaucoup, exults Papa Wemba in his semiotically unsound Union Jack-et. Merci indeed.

There are bound to be some gripes about Womadelaide- not enough telephones, long queues, still some sound glitches. And the printed program. Great that it's free. Not great that Rhythms magazine published only breezy advertising copy as notes on the acts. Womad isn't meant to be a musicological seminar but the point of the exercise is to improve our cubits of knowledge about the many unfamiliar sounds we are being introduced to. More prefatory explanations, translations and song lists would be welcome.

That said, Womadelaide is an event of such calibre that each time it raises its own stakes almost impossibly. Leaving Botanic Park to the bell-like voice of Tibetan musician Yunchen Lamo we experience a kind of benediction. It is skilfully orchestrated, of course. But not even the most cynical can resist the feeling that for two days and three nights we have stepped out of the mousewheel.

The Adelaide Review, March, 1995.

And There's More

Published: 1995-12-01 *Adelaide Festival*

Murray Bramwell talks to Barrie Kosky about the 1996 Adelaide Festival

Barrie Kosky is looking almost weary. With a twenty-four hour stubble and his number two razor-cut in undefined grow-back phase, he is not saying no to a late morning coffee. He tells me he has just completed his seventh Hills hoisting, a six o'clock spruik in the Festival Theatre organised for anyone-who-might-be-interested. But even as he describes his glittering reprise the energy returns. Kosky is, without doubt, one of the Adelaide Festival's little engines that can.

It is now five weeks since the program launch at the Piccadilly Cinema, the clothesline summit where, seated on top of the familiar domestic rotary, festooned with red lights, Barrie Kosky, Artistic Director, announced details of the 1996 Telstra Adelaide Festival. With artful assistance from multi-media whizz Adrian Adams, Kosky spread his dreams at our feet. And far be it for me to tread on such dreams.

Kosky's appointment as AD was controversial, even the selection committee was divided. His initial dealings with some sections of the cultural establishment were strained. For some that remains so. But it is true to say that since he took the director's job he has been the most visible and attentive festival planner anyone can remember. The ubiquity is certainly highly self-conscious- to the point that his owlish specs and serious-young-insect press photos should have TM stamped next to them. But he has also mixed and mingled, listened to those around him and generally put himself into caffe latte society.

'Two years ago when I arrived," he recalls, "I thought I wouldn't have to justify or worry about explaining the importance of the festival- all I had to do to was go out and present the next one. But with some of the problems that happened last year I spent about fifty percent of my time persuading people that the festival was worth having. Which is bizarre when consider the Adelaide Festival's reputation and its thirty year history."

At the launch, the chair of the Festival Board, ad-man Andrew Killey described himself as the luckiest person since Ringo Starr. "I came into the Festival at a time of complete review , restructuring and refocusing," he explains, "at a time when government demonstrated interest in making the festival even better. I get a terrific guy like Ian Scobie as general manager, a good marketing team, and, then the cream on the cake, you get a bloke like Barrie Kosky as Artistic Director. Apart from the program and its variety -he is such a great enthusiast for it all. He loves to talk to everybody, to cocktail parties, to the media, to everybody."

The talking has worked. This festival has unprecedented levels of corporate sponsorship and the deals are nearly all for a cluster of three festivals- so the 1998 event will immediately benefit from the present momentum. The push is on for promotion interstate. Kosky has already taken taking the Hills-alive campaign to Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. Killey and others are working on local burghers for support and, at the same time, selectively securing closer ties with cities in Asia.

So, beyond the hoopla and video opportunities of the launch, there is a sense of a solidly planned program and smooth, good-natured organisation. Kosky's presentation slide show at the Piccadilly with quick-byte film clips was a sign of confident marketing- succinct, modish and not afraid of a few laughs. Using an iconic clothespeg (A is for Adelaide and also for TelstrA) the director outlined his themes.

The objectives of the festival emerged gradually for Kosky. "I had particular ideas of what a festival should be. I also had to do a lot work to get people to re-engage. But I don't believe- as some of my colleagues interstate do- that you divide festivals into highbrow and low. This notion that there is an arts audience and then there is -the people... I think there are more interesting ways to branch out and regain the audience."

"You have got a core audience who is going to come. But it's like circles. You want to make sure that another group is going to see theatre or a dance company. Then there is another audience who is only going to see Tito Puente or Nancy Sinatra or a rock concert. But to me its important that you always present work which is of the highest quality and that it is diverse. It is important not to patronise audiences or categorise them. I believe that if people only go to one thing- a concert in the park or whatever, the thing is that they participate. It's like the Grand Prix. A lot of people go not so much for the motor racing but to be part of the celebration."

As for the themes. They began around discussions of architecture -or as Kosky identifies it, of questions of public and private space. But the spark came from Adelaide's own history and mythology. Kosky identifies his eureka moment-

"I think it was when I was talking about Colonel Light when something went 'ting'. Then talking to Paul Carter about his Light installation and his book about Colonel Light. There are interesting connections to my ideas of utopia, ecstacy and map. Colonel Light was born outside the English milieu. His mother was a Portuguese Malay and he wrote about ecstatic music and the bells of Penang. Talking to Paul triggered things in my mind."

When, at the launch, Kosky explained these threads, arranged around three thematic nodes - Ecstacy, Map and Utopia- I have to say, in the heat of exposition, the concepts started to jump about like frogs in a bucket. But the invitation to subscribers to choose songlines and walking paths is a provocative one and Kosky and his team have included an enticing range of offerings in the name of rapture, topos and hope.

The program he has assembled is a large one. Not as big as 1988 or 1992, he is quick to observe, but it is probably next in line. It is impressive- and dense. And, for those reasons, difficult to describe. It gave rise to Kosky's widely reported Demtel quip. As he drew breath from the sheer task of describing the program, even in thumbnail form, Kosky wryly compared himself to the infamous tele-spruikers from Demtel. And there's more. With the peeler, the parer and the vegetable slicer, there is still more.

So let's see what we get. In dance theatre there is the Batsheva Company from Israel, and DV8 Physical Theatre -Australian Lloyd Newson's troupe from the UK. From Brussels, out of New Orleans, comes Meg Stuart/Damaged Goods and Betontanc come from Ljublijana, in Slovenia. Japanese company, Molecular Theatre, present Facade Firm and Meryl Tankard's ADT will enter the Bull-Ring at Wayville Showgrounds. Jonathan Mills, Nanette Hassall and the Leigh Warren Dancers's production, The Ethereal Eye explores the vision of the Burley Griffins. And, from Barcelona, La Fura Del Baus will create a Spanish form of Archaos theory.

And, there is more. The Maly Theatre of St Petersburg, a major attraction announced in the first round of offers, will stage Gaudeamus in the Playhouse and Claustrophobia in the Festival Theatre. Another company, The Handspring Puppet Company from South Africa, also inspires Koskyian hyperbole . Watch for their adaptions of European classics -Woyzeck on the Highveld and Faustus in Africa. Red Shed returns with Station 2: Eye of Another and students from Flinders Drama Centre collaborate with Okinawan colleagues for Red Sun-Red Earth written by John Romeril and directed by Hisao Takase.

The music program is similarly hybrid, mutant and attractively contemporary. Kronos Quartet makes a welcome return, Art Zoyd create large sounds to rekindle the melodrama of Murnau's Nosferatu and, to celebrate the second century of film, Pierre Henry will marshall audio landscapes for Russian film-maker Dziga Vertov's The Man with the Camera. Also, Bang on the Can Allstars from Manhattan's Lower East Side will play a range of new works from Glass to white noise.

The Festival encompasses music ancient and modern. Jordi Savall and members from Hesperion XX will perform from the 17th century French and Spanish repertoire, Ozopera will do a portable version of The Magic Flute and in the parade ground area- renamed Red Square -an array of vocalists will create the Singing Map. Yunghen Lhamo from Tibet, the Bauls of Bengal and the Throat Singers from Tuva will all perform along with the Whirling Dervishes, accompanied by the Turkish Mystical Music State Ensemble. Scriabin is the guest composer (posthumous) and State Opera will present chamber works by Gershwin and Lennie Bernstein.

And on it goes. There are famous poseurs - Annie Sprinkle, post porn modernist, Sandra Bernhard, bitch friend of the famous, and Malcolm McLaren, the Alfred Jarry of the Kings Road. The free concerts will give plenty for nothing and the visual arts program is something else again.

It is interesting to note how many of the European works reflect a volatility unimaginable ten or fifteen years ago. The notion that Europe is as much Sarajevo as Vienna is evident. "People say some of the work is dark and disturbing," Kosky observes,"I say -interesting and disturbing. That's what's happening. Maly is genuinely out of its culture. So is Betontanc from Slovenia. So is Meg Stuart. Most of the art I saw in Europe was not about apocalypse or the millenium but it was about society in a state of disruption. Not a sense of cataclysm but of bits falling off. I don't think that's negative."

Ever prepared for a discouraging word from those who don't like the look of what has been planned, Kosky, does not, as they say in politics, resile. "The program has certain things reflective of my tastes and personality but in terms of it being shocking or provocative -that challenge is part of the tradition of the Adelaide Festival. There are links with Anthony Steel's programs. I went back over previous programs to make links, to ask: is this interesting after they've seen that ? We go, for instance, from Mark Morris and the Frankfurt Ballet to DV8 and Meg Stuart. There is continuity and dialogue with previous festivals."

Barrie Kosky has put together fifty companies from thirty three countries and promises sixteen world premieres. It is a sharp, attractive program, pitched at a younger audience and with a creditable number of Adelaide exclusives. If this festival brochure doesn't bring the cultural tourists back into Adelaide nothing will.

As for those of us who only have to step on to the footpath to be in a Festival city, the first three weeks in March should be full of ecstatic, geographical and utopian opportunity. I wouldn't be surprised if, after a second look, even Graham Cornes finds something to like.

"People have the right to strongly dislike things in the festival," Kosky observes," But that doesn't mean they shouldn't be on. In a festival you can't expect everybody to think that everything is fantastic. But this program has been planned so that every single day something new is happening. The first week focuses on the music. Then, in week two, we have DV8, the Slovenians, La Fura Dels Baus. Hopefully, the festival will keep unfolding itself over seventeen days."

The Adelaide Review, No.146, December, 1995, p.20.

All the World's a Three Day Stage

Published: 1996 *WOMADelaide*

Womadelaide

Murray Bramwell talks with Womadelaide organisers Rob Brookman and Thomas Brooman about the World Music festival's continuing success.

Adelaide's Botanic Park is a green haven right in the centre of town. With its majestic Moreton Bay figs and well-watered meadow, it is bounded by the zoo on one side and the botanical gardens on the other. Not surprisingly, it is a favourite spot for a scattered population of picnickers, joggers, strollers, sketchers, spin bowlers and anybody else fancying a bit of leisure sur l'herbe. However, next weekend, this quiet domain of nineteenth century arcadian empire will be inundated with as many as fifteen thousand fans, all ready for Womad's three days of cultural surprise and musical delight.

Womadelaide began as part of the 1992 Adelaide Festival, but for artistic director Rob Brookman it goes back to 1989 when he first visited the small Lancashire seaside town of Morecambe Bay. There he first saw the Sufi qawwali singer, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan perform, and there he met his future associate, Womad UK organiser, Thomas Brooman. As it turned out, the two had more in common than very similar surnames. For some time Brookman had been looking around for just this sort of music event.

"It goes back to my work with the Adelaide Festival over many years," he recalls. "And it came to a head with Lord Harewood's program in 1988 with its mini-festival of Indian music and dance, and Clifford Hocking's 1990 festival which included Ali Akbar Khan and Mercedes Sosa. I really wanted to pick up strengths already there."

When Brookman got the nod to direct the 1992 Adelaide Festival he started to look about. But he didn't want just to add sixteen separate concerts within the Festival program-"you'd create internal competition and it simply wouldn't work. I thought of having an outdoor festival but I had arrived at what I wanted before I arrived at Womad. Then I came across this stuff about Womad in the UK and I thought, 'Here is exactly what I've been thinking about and someone else is doing it. Great ! "

This Womad, Brookman had read about, was an acronym for World of Music, Arts and Dance and began in 1980 as an idea shared by Thomas Brooman, Bob Hooton and leading edge singer Peter Gabriel, who, as patron and financial angel, has supported this project, for international understanding through music, since its initial festival at Shepton Mallett in 1982. Vital to the operation, Gabriel's record label Real World, based near Wiltshire in South West England, provides an important promotion and sales adjunct to the live performances.

Womad has had some bumpy times with heavy festival losses in the UK and Europe and an unsuccessful Lollapalooza-style tour in the US. But since a 1993 bailout from Gabriel and restructuring which brought closer links between Real World and the Womad festival operations, things are on the rise. Virgin Records has signed another three year deal with Real World and Womad concerts are scheduled this year in Spain and Austria as well as Reading, Morecambe and London's Barbican Centre.

But it was an earlier Morecambe Bay that provided the idea for Rob Brookman. Although, he thought it could be improved on. As he recalls it, "the town itself was pretty tawdry, there were no beautiful parks so the best that could be done was a big circus tent on a parking lot behind a row of shops. It was populated with ferals and vegans in VW vans, some three or four thousand people jammed into this very urban event."

Thomas Brooman is the first to describe Morecambe as "eccentric" - but the Womad concept itself was to get a considerable leg up when the UK organiser flew to Adelaide for talks about a fixture in 1992. Looking about for venues Brooman could see, as he rather ornately puts it, that "the culture of the outdoor festival which had grown up in Europe, combined with the Adelaide environment and climate, makes for a complete marriage of cultural opportunity and setting."

The original plan was to use the Long Gully ovals in the Belair National Park as the Womadelaide venue. It was even announced in the brochures. Then the Country Fire Service and the police stepped in, concerned that a late summer bushfire in the national park would be quite bad enough without having ten thousand extra people camped on the Long Gully ovals. It was then that Brookman moved to Plan B - and what has now proven a prophetically good idea - and approached the Botanic Gardens administrators and the City Council for permission to locate at Botanic Park.

The rest is almost history. Under the aegis of the 1992 Adelaide Festival, Brookman presented the first Womadelaide with a program including Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Remmy Ongala, Youssou N'Dour, Trio Bulgarka, Sheila Chandra, Crowded House and scores of others.

It proved an important turning point for the Festival, in fact it was a coup of a very quiet kind, in simultaneously providing an increased multicultural program with an openly popular one. It has always been a Womad tactic to mix sufi chanting with Siouxie and the Banshees, the Indian classical violin of Subramaniam with the reggae soul rhythms of Remmy Ongala or Jah Wobble's Invaders of the Heart. And, as well as budgeting a generous subsidy to this fledgling event, Brookman used the considerable resources of the Adelaide Festival's technical and organisational expertise to ensure the best possible production values.

To consolidate as a biennial, not-the Festival-year event, Brookman followed in 1993 with an even more successful venture. Numbers were up - from 34,000 attendances in 1992 to 42,000 the following year. The formula was starting to become established, audiences were now familiar with the format and the venue. The sound stages were relocated- after causing some grief to sections of the zoo population the previous year, the catering ran more smoothly and at the same high standard, and the headliners were as engaging as ever.

Salif Keita visited, Peter Gabriel himself participated. Word on Womad was very good.

This year sponsorship is solid and in the Kennett-style rush to claim major events there has been boisterous political support. Premier John Olsen launched the program and Arts minister Di Laidlaw gingerly passed around amber coloured multicultural solidarity ribbons. But that is all fine by Rob Brookman - and his associates in what is now the private production company, APA - if it secures what is still a risky venture.

"It still takes a big leap of faith in saying - 'Yes. we can do an event which includes a whole lot of artists that nobody's ever heard of, and who don't get airplay on radio stations, and who aren't heard on television, and who are probably only in absolute diehards' record collections.' If we had gone to AME (Australian Major Events) in 1992 they would have been very hard to convince. So when the Premier trumpets the event in the same breath as the Adelaide Festival and the minister for the Arts gets up and espouses the cause of world music and racial tolerance, I couldn't hope for anything better."

But while no-one is likely to clone Womad the way the Big Day Out has spawned imitators, the fourth time round is also less formidable than the first. As Thomas Brooman notes, international communication has made life both more local and more global and the fifteen years of Womad have been paralleled by a general increase in cultural diversity. In all forms of popular music hybridisation is taking place - like 1997 Womad act, the Afro-Celt Sound System, with its blend of Irish, African and rave rhythms.

"They have sold more than 100.000 albums for Real World," Brooman reports, "which is very big for us. With this changing audience for music and all the sampling and technology that is going on, musicians are going to be looking around the world more and more. "

"Twenty years ago Womad would be unimaginable," Brookman observes."Other cultures were seen as too alien and the number interested in the exotic was limited or reduced to some commercial common denominator like Georgian or Caribbean music. Until the seventies, cultures other than western cultures were put in a basket of simple flamboyant exoticism, whereas now, people's ears are tuning up in a different way. Fine music has been shaken also - with early music, Gregorian chant and recent composers like Gorecki and Gavin Bryars. The Kronos Quartet has never played Womad but they surely would fit in."

But while commercial broadcasters avoid the diversity of world music, ABC programs such as The Planet under the stewardship of Lucky Oceans and Robyn Johnstone continue to chart the Womad universe, as does Triple J and SBS radio and television. Another interesting feature of Womadelaide is its audience range. Brookman describes the demographic as "huge" - from the tribes of Triple J to Baby Boomers and their families, to the septugenarian subscribers of the Adelaide Festival. The high level of passenger comfort also contributes to this. Compared to the rigours of Big day Out, for instance, Womad in Botanic Park is considerably more gentrified.

And for the estimated 65,000 attendances this year, there is all that music. More than two hundred artists from more than twenty countries. Loudon Wainwright and Richard Thompson for the middle-angst; Shooglenifty, Afro-Celt Sound System and Fun-da-mental for the house ravers; Midnight Oil and Paul Kelly for the Aussie rockers; the Guo Brothers and Joji Hirota for the ethereal; Kev Carmody, Telek and Christine Anu for the regional; and Salif Keita, Tenores di Bitti, Radio Tarifa and Misia for the distinctively vocal. As Brookman notes, "Womadelaide is one of the places where fifteen year olds willingly accompany their families and when parents can get to be mildly cool."

Brookman and Brooman are justly proud of the event. "We've got the reputation, location, atmosphere and great word of mouth," says Rob. "It's a real pleasure to bring artists to this venue," echoes Thomas. "In all the sites in all the world - that I get to see - it is very rare that it's as nice an opportunity as Botanic Park."

And the future? Retaining Adelaide as the main event, says Brookman, and getting it closer to stand-alone commercial status. Meanwhile, there is an Auckland Womad to follow in March and Adelaide involvement in events in Singapore and in Ubud, in Bali, in 1998. It looks as though this Womad could be a world thing after all.

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Figuring the Landscape

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Murray Bramwell talks with Philippe Genty and Mary Underwood about their new Australian-based production, Stowaways.

For nearly twenty years Philippe Genty has been an Australian stowaway. Ever since his first visit to the Adelaide and Perth Festivals in1978 he has lodged in the minds of a diverse Australian audience which has been both entranced and intrigued by the imaginative world of his theatre. His wacky dancing ostriches and weird little floating homunculi, his erotic puppets festooned in cellophane, his figures in trenchcoats held by hooks from attaining objects of desire, his deckchair fantasias- all have been conjured before our eyes. And with this bewildering variety of inaminate objects, inflatables, dirigibles and unbelievables, Genty and his creative partner Mary Underwood have produced matinee surrealism.

Working out of Paris, Genty and Underwood have fashioned what you might call a string of successes -Round as a Cube, Sigmund Follies, Desirs Parade, Drifting, Forget Me Not and their current inernational touring work, Voyageur Immobile. But Stowaways, which opens in Adelaide on February 2, is a unique venture. Devised and and developed in partnership with the Adelaide Festival Centre Trust, State Theatre, the Festival of Perth, the Victorian Arts Centre and the Queensland Performing Arts Trust, this is Genty's first project out of France and it celebrates his long association with Australia.

It also stems from the particular friendship which developed with The AFCT's Executive Producer Rob Brookman whom Genty met on the company's first tour and as their association continued to prosper the two discussed the possibility of an Adelaide based venture .

"We talked about this for ten years, " Genty notes with amusement, "it was becoming a joke." Finally, the project was set up in April last year with Genty and Mary Underwood in October taking up residence in a cottage in Adelaide's inner city. The usual development time for a Genty production is twelve months so Stowaways, with a four month preparation, is something of a quickie.

With a production budget of $750,000 it represents a considerable commitment on the part of the producers who were faced with the possibility of disruptions, or even cancellation, when President Girac's nuclear testing program began causing one le boycott after another. Genty, politically active since the days of the Paris strikes of 1968, was himself sympathetic to the protests.

"I wonder whether Australians know that more than sixty percent of French people are against the tests," he observes, "I think the fight is important and we should continue this battle."

Fortunately, the joint venture between Genty and a group of Australian artists - performers Meredith Kitchen, Jennifer Newman-Preston, Brian Parker, Simon Rann and Russell Garbutt, fabricators Martin Rezard and Gilli Hope, composer Ian McDonald and lighting designer Phil Lethlean- has not been sabotaged by circumstance. In fact, it is a measure of the familiarity and regard for the company in Australia that they are seen as quite remote from any current Gallic haughtiness.

With Stowaways, Philippe Genty is taking the opportunity of his Australian sojourn to delve directly personal experiences for his themes. This is not the first time either. Familiar with the processes of psychoanalysis he began a process of self-analysis, or as he describes it, auto-analysis.

"When we toured in 1979 we were here for nine months. It seemed like neutral ground so I decided to do an auto-analysis. I had none of the stress of being in France. I had been nourished by many works - that of Freud, Bettelheim, Jung, Melanie Klein, all this literature. I knew it would hard to do but as I was accustomed to images and was starting to collect my dreams and write them down as precisely as I could, I thought I would try. "

Genty describes having fears and anxieties, in particular a belief that he would die when his son turned seven years old. "I knew there was something to unknot, " he recalls, " but I didn't know what . It went on for nearly nine months, like a birth. I would write down a dream, it would become very clear and then I would interpret it. For the first time in my life I began to get rashes all over my body but when I wrote something, put my finger on something, the rashes would go. It was quite exemplary, I've never experienced anything like it."

Genty describes unravelling a trauma which occurred when he was seven. Two policemen came to his house to tell his mother that his father had been killed in a skiing accident. He had overheard the conversation but repressed it and his mother then had not told him until more than year later what had happened.

"My mother hid this from me which was the worst thing to do because I had this feeling of guilt that I'd done something wrong. I believed she had concealed me from the police. I was in the Oedipal period and so I was in love with my mother and wishing my father wasn't there. The whole thing built up. My mother put me in boarding school and that was the end. I escaped from sixteen schools in ten years. It was one continuous flight,an escape. And this whole thing is Stowaways.

"The structure is based around a character who has a childhood trauma which leads to a split into various personalities which take him in various directions before he achieves a re-integration. It is a way of saying... especially in our society where there is so much stress and schism, it is a way of testifying that there is still hope."

It is from such private imagery that Genty and Mary Underwood develop their public work. From dreams and improvisations they evolve correlatives to dream.

"I am always fascinated to explore the conflict that goes on in human beings. It is not usually a social conflict but rather the human being facing his or her own conflict. From here we go into an inner landcape, into a dream. Not in the usual narrative way of teling a story. It evolves around association, like in a dream."

Genty and Underwood build their work from these impressions and intuitions. Then they look for the materials - which may include anything from brown paper to industrial strength plastic.

"You start to work with fabric and you say the fabric should do that," Genty explains," Then you realise there is a resistance and the fabric does not want to say that. You either say 'I'll force it' and will be dry and uninteresting' or 'I'll try to go its way' -which can be frustrating until suddenly it is revealing things which are deep within you, that you didn't want to touch on or disclose. That is the fascinating moment. It is when the creation starts. It is the same with the performers. You bring them close to the void when they want to reveal things about themselves, then the sparks come out."

It is by such a process that composer Ian McDonald has built up his music for the production, using a synthesiser while the performers rehearse.

"I work on headphones and watch," McDonald explains," And when I feel brave enough I might play a bit to what they are doing and see what Philippe's response will be. He is very interested in depth of texture, and so am I. You have to work hard with synths to get that. In the early stages it was very much a discussion about emotions.

"For instance Philippe would say this is a dance piece that will last maybe eight, ten minutes. It's to do with memories of childhood. With sadness, a sense of loss, a kind of funereal procession- so there's a melancholy. But it's springtime. So he is pushing the contradictions of the child's playfulness, of the funereal feeling, spring and melancholy.

"I've come to recognise it is part of his language that he puts up contradictions like that all the time. He loves to see how what he calls a void will appear in between them. When elements don't meet you are left with a void. And that's the space into which the audience can go. They either fall into it willingly or they stand looking at it hesitatingly like an abyss."

McDonald emphasises Genty's precision and his patience in looking for just the right effect or meaning. "He's alway questioning, he has lots of doubts. he's prepared to go a out on a limb and go out a long way. Sometimes he'll suggest something rather minimal and we'll go with it for a few days and he'll say-'I think it's my fault' We will have pushed so far and then he'll admit it's not right.

"There is a lot of honesty in his work. So then you trust him and think-'I'll go anywhere you want to go.' In that way we've discovered some terrific things that neither of us expected." The Australian, January 24, 1996.

Artful Dodges

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Adelaide Festival

Living Yesterday Tomorrow

Malcolm McLaren

Her Majesty's

The speaker for the evening takes the stage. Strolling towards the lectern in a baggy black suit and a peach coloured open-neck shirt, shuffling papers and lugging an attache case, he looks like a dotty art theory lecturer. *This* is Malcolm McLaren ? The Fagin of punk, Alfred Jarry of the Kings Road, bagman for the Sex Pistols ?

With his tousled Harpo curls, his languorous eyelids and drawling delivery he could be a toned-down Quentin Crisp, or some chum of Clive Bell's here to inform us about the works of Stanley Spencer. Instead Malcolm McLaren, who turned fifty in January, has come to tell us he is the last romantic- choosing for theme: traditional sanctity and loveliness. Well almost. He is certainly more Wilde than angry these days and his meditations on life and work are now more inflected by aestheticism than by Alexander Trocchi's sixties situationists

Not that any of this is a bad thing or at all uninteresting. McLaren has always been a very good talker-about-himself and as consultant to everyone from Steven Spielberg to the Polish government he is still an acute reader of the zeitgeist.

I don't know how all this will go, he muses at the opening of the show- in Perth I talked until one in the morning. Yeah yeah, we think, a bit of Malcolm hyperbole. Apparently not. The McLaren disquisition runs for just on four hours- with slides, asides and whatever questions you have left. There is little visible artifice and a strong sense of the extempore, but an evening with Malcolm McLaren is rarely dull. It's like have a very long cup of coffee with someone who, while greatly liking the sound of their own voice, is also worth the attention.

His narrative begins with childhood and an enmeshed relationship with Rose Isaacs, his wealthy Jewish grandmother. Dickensian analogies abound as, Fagin to his Oliver, she encourages the freckly child to behave with impish indifference to the requirements of school and society. The neurotic fix on his gran lasted until his early teens -according to McLaren he slept in her bed until he thirteen, fawning to her delusions and serving as her confidante. His mother he hardly knew, or so he says. His father he met for the first time a few years ago.

As he recounts his personal mythology it is Art School which opens him to the world- and one which gives him licence. This was the period when all of English pop was emerging from the art schools- Brian Jones and Keith, Ray Davies, Pete Townshend, all the fine young cannibals. It was then that McLaren met his Yoko- designer Vivienne Westwood, who led him into the Chelsea scene of happenings and fashion.

Pointing his electronic slide changer towards the screen at arbitrary intervals, he narrates the metamorphosing history of 430 Kings Road, McLaren and Westwood's shop turned gallery, turned crucible of style. 430 transmogrified from the Teddy Boy timewarp Let it Rock to become, in turn, Too Fast to Live, Too Young to Die, the notorious SEX shop, Seditionaries: Clothes for Heroes, World's End and Nostagia of Mud.

Malcolm McLaren reminds us through this succession of concepts and boutique facades that for him music was merely an accessory to selling T-shirts. It is the haberdashery that fascinates him, son and grandson of London tailors, paramour of Westwood of Chelsea. Never mind the chord changes, feel the zips and safety pins.

In his revisionist history the Sex Pistols are little more than a footnote. Depicted as a slightly more rodenty version of the Bash Street Kids, the Pistols are good for a few oneliners- Steve Jones is the artful thief, John Lydon Rotten is despised for his Catholic repression, Glen Matlock is the wimp sent to Coventry and poor, pathetic Sid, is merely an artistic aside, exemplum of the Pistols' parody of themselves. The nasty facts-Sid and Nancy and all that sad jazz- are overlooked, as is any reference to the lengthy litigation between Lydon and McLaren about who owned the rights to the name Rotten.

More upbeat are the descriptions of the Buffalo Gals fashion show (with matching hiphop hit single) and McLaren's excursions into aural merchandising with *Fans* and *Paris*. Depending on your point of view, McLaren's narrative is either a portrait of stupefying superficiality or he is the harbinger, like Warhol and Madonna, of true postmodern flux. He is probably both. He believes in beautiful things, he can explain his t-shirts down to the last inverted swastika (they are now in the V and A Museum in London). He is at his proudest describing the outfit that made Adam Ant an overnight sensation.

An evening with Malcolm McLaren is a strange and contrary thing. He is generous in his time and candour, he is self-serving in his selective memory. He is charming and undoubtedly smart and although given the chance to parachute out at eleven o'clock I happily stayed till the end. Mind you, running on till 12.30 in the morning, with plenty of wind still in his sails, you wondered whether Malcolm McLaren might become an overnight sensation all over again.

The Adelaide Review, No.150, March, 1996, p.27.

Break-out

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Claustrophobia devised by the Maly Company

Maly Theatre of St Petersburg Festival Theatre

Reviewed by Murray Bramwell

In both Gaudeamus and Claustrophobia, the Maly Theatre present us with a profusion of mixed messages. The company, youthful, vibrant and full of theatrical charm performs material which is often bitter, predatory, and seething with cynicism. The vignettes of life in the Construction Battalion in Gaudeamus show a vicious, divisive group of young people brutalised by circumstance. And the closing tableau with the company joining together for the medieval song, Gaudeamus , with its fraternal theme: youth is for rejoicing - leaves us so discomforted by the irony of the sentiment that it is hard to be sure of its intention.

In past festivals the theatre we saw from what was then the Soviet Union- the Rustaveli Company and the Georgian Film Actors studio- presented highly coded works resonant with sub-text. Richard III had a particular menace, Caucasian Chalk Circle a very specific absurdity. Productions of Gogol's Government Inspector served, as they did for Meyerhold, to use indirectness to find direction out.

Claustrophobia, Maly Theatre's newest touring production, is more discursive than Gaudeamus and even more problematic. Partly this is because it is been developed from a series of improvisation workshops which have produced memorable images but not an integrated piece. Also it is unclear when the company is objectively describing what they see and when they are presenting what they believe. This is not material which we can just let wash over us, especially when its is so engagingly staged. It is reasonable to ask what the production is signing to us, what it is endorsing and what rejecting. This may be clear to audiences closer to recent events in Eastern Europe but when we bring to Claustrophobia our garbled, CNN-distorted notions of contemporary Russian life, we are likely to find ourselves at sea.

The Company's notes describe two tendencies at work in what is seen as a national condition of suffocation and psychosis. The civil decay, alcoholism and violence of the society- especially among the young- is matched also by a mood of idealism and communality. The dystopic struggles against the utopian in difficult ways. The themes the company proclaim are that art will find a way and love will find a way. In some respects Claustrophobia is like the Russian version of Hair, itself an expression of millenarianism only decipherable in the context the war in Vietnam.

Set in Room 319 of the Theatre Academy, a spacious white room with a high ceiling and a row of arched windows, Claustrophobia describes a succession of attempts to both break in and break out of the ritualised order of the space. The young troupe dressed in creamy linens and soft pastels are in a dance rehearsal when two young men in long black coats and berets appear through a side window. They announce themselves as Ubiquists- organisms who can adapt to life under any conditions.

Then the scene melts into a solo dance by a young man in a lavender dress who is joined by a large young woman also dressed in lavender. The music shifts from slide guitar to Tom Waits as the two cavort the stage, largely for the purposes of making the young woman look incongruous. It is a gratuitous false note. The following scene is a schoolroom science lesson on the properties of hydrochloric acid with the teacher gradually exposing her sexuality and arousing one of the young students. Then through the window come a series of young woman tearing off their bodices and frolicking with the now semi-naked teacher. If this is not mere exploitation then it is a cryptic message- neither integrated with a general sensuality in the whole group nor lucid as an image of sexual and gender liberation. With such a scene we can only guess at meanings as they collide with our own.

Other images , however, are painfully clear. As in Gaudeamus addiction and alcoholism is depicted as a universal condition, as a kind of social white noise. A young woman, Zina is sitting outside a church with the crippled Katya. She prays to the Virgin Mary much to Katya's derision. They are surrounded by a crowd of beggars near the church drinking vodka and cheap perfume and singing AC/DC songs. It is a powerful scene of incipient violence and despair which is then satirised as the group turns into a queue. Queueing is mockingly presented as the national pastime. Queues for anything- fish fur coats, funeral plots, who cares- just make sure you buy two when you get there.

The longest queue is to Lenin's tomb and one of the production's strongest scenes, in its energy and sardonic comedy, is where a group of surgeons try to prevent Lenin from going mouldy. They apply their instruments- trumpets, French horns, saxophones and tubas- in a raucous attempt at revival. When Lenin does sit up the young actor playing the role cavorts on a swing with a young woman representing Nadia, Lenin's wife as they enjoy a reverie about happy days in Siberia.

Claustrophobia is given to such wild mood swings. A black figure performs a dance representing insomnia, asylum inmates argue about which great writer was most alcoholic. In one of the darkest scenes an army captain and his wife prepare a meal of pelmeni. They begin to drink in celebration and the husband turns violent and the wife hysterical as he jumps on a chair urinating on her head. It is a frightening spectre of domestic savagery. The final major sequence where a model farm has lost all its stock through foot and mouth disease and the workers have now taken the place of the animals, also feeds the play's nihilist and bitter satire.

Claustrophobia, directed with a kind of symphonic fluency by Lev Dodin, ravishingly designed by Alexey Poray-Koshits and splendidly lit by Oleg Kozlov and Dmitri Leitland, is a majestic work but an unresolved one. Like Gaudeamus it hurtles between images of vehement social decay and those so lambent that they seem like caricature. The final image of the players- in a circle facing inwards, their hands quivering as a young woman is raised above them- verges on drama class corniness. But the sight of this troupe of performers adept in dance, music, and movement, singing like a professional choir, vigorous and talented in every way, is the production's clearest sign. Maybe Claustrophobia is just like Russia itself at present- all over the place. But the Maly Theatre Company are artists of the highest calibre and we wait enthusiastically to see where their explorations take them next.

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Adelaide Fringe Theatre and Other Soloists

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The 1996 Adelaide Fringe program lists sixty-two entries under Theatre, not including another ten or so roosting under the heading of Comedy. The range is huge in both style and quality. There are a variety of spins on Shakespeare, revivals of classics such as Marlowe's Edward II and Buchner's Danton's Death, as well as productions of contemporary playwrights Wallace Shawn, Edward Albee and Stephen Berkoff. There is also a gratifying array of new and self-devised work.

Lotus War , written by Julie Janson and crisply directed by Sally Sussman, is a monologue set in the Museum of the Mausoleum of Ho Chi Minh. A courteous young woman is greeting tourists, including Australian veterans, introducing them to the transformed Vietnamese society. But amidst the achievements of the present are the ghosts of the civil dead- memories of torture, rape and death, and the paranoia that each returning tourist is a blast from the past. Incorporating classical Vietnamese music devised by Ngoc-Tuan Hoang and evocatively performed by Dang Lan, Lotus War re-examines the place of women in the country's history. There are risks of theatrical worthiness here. Instead, actor Valerie Berry brings a memorable freshness and precision.

Zhodi Cummings' solo show The Bursting Heart is also nicely balanced. Collaborator with nerd comedians Lano and Woodley, Cummings's own work also examines fragile comic territory. Secluded in her flat the young narrator consoles herself with peanut paste sandwiches while water begins to seep inexorably along the floors. Distracting herself with a meandering narrative about a fairy-tale figure named Empty Hands, Cummings and director Sue Giles, run close to the perils of whimsy but successfully create a subtle, original portrait of urban anxiety and the fragility of identity.

The double-bill at the Edinburgh Castle from Lucky Hearts has a swing at describing some aspects of the masculine. Shadowboxing, a fine monodrama by Michael Gaddes, is given a punchy physicality by Dushyant Kumar, as a young prize fighter faces his gay sexuality. Adapted from Benedict Eroteev's novel of the same name, From Moscow to Petushki is a narrative of a Russian existentialist making the last train journey of his life. Tortured, alcoholic, neurotically sensitive, it is the portrait of a hobo intellectual, vigorously performed and deftly staged by director Doug Leonard with astute use of video and some edgy music from Andrew Tranter.

The most ambitious and rewarding show this week is Blueprint's production of Howard Barker's Wounds to the Face. Elegantly designed in Rear Window style by Imogen Thomas, with confident direction from Benedict Andrews, this fragmentary play is Howard Barker at his confrontational best. The human face is examined as a site of identity, power and erotics - and with relentless Artaudian economy Blueprint create a succession of chilling and diplacing images. A war veteran has lost his face in a mine explosion, a political demagogue creates the face of tyranny, a surgeon is tried for crimes against the integrity of the face, a painter is blinded for accurately painting the phiz of his emperor. Blueprint's intelligent cogent production deserves a return season.

And also in the Fringe- as well as fronting sessions at Writers' Week- Demon Dog James Ellroy is touring his literary medicine show. The distinguished crime writer, author of the LA Quartet and recently, Time magazine's book of 1995, American Tabloid is doing a whistlestop show of readings, spruiking and hipster vogueing. Accompanied by The Jackson Code, Mark Snarski's tasty seven piece band from Sydney, Ellroy pitches his view of the American psychosis. Parlaying his retro-crime narrative style to the stage Ellroy gives us the best crimes of his generation, destroyed by madness and the perfidy of the LA cops. It's a great show, hepcats, full of bravura, spilled beans and reminders of the quality of his sinewy prose.

The Australian, Arts on Friday, March 3, 1996.

Preview - The Sounds of Womade-laide

Published: 1997-02-01 *WOMADelaide*

Murray Bramwell

The last day of February is the first day of Womadelaide 1997. What began as a part of Rob Brookman's 1992 Adelaide Festival now continues as a biennial major event. Not only does it have a strong local following but this year's organisers predict that of the expected 65,000 attendances nearly 8,000 will come from interstate and overseas.

There is good reason for this buoyancy because the Adelaide version of Peter Gabriel's original Womad concept continues to be among the most successful anywhere. While Womad festivals have had very mixed fortunes in Europe and the UK, Botanic Park at the beginning of the Adelaide autumn offers not only ideal weather but one of the most convenient and idyllic settings as well.

This year's fixture is managed by Arts Projects Australia, namely the old firm of Brookman, Ian Scobie, Colin Koch and Steve Brown, who with Thomas Brooman from the UK Womad organisation have co-ordinated the event since its inception. Optus has been recently announced as presenting sponsor and both the Premier and Arts minister Di Laidlaw have boosted the festival as among South Australia's finest.

The program for 1997 sees a mix of new acts and some welcome returns. Given the continuity of the event, the fourth Womadelaide builds on previous achievements. Audience have been educated by the festival itself and, ABC programs such as The Planet and SBS radio and television have deepened and widened our knowledge of what is known rather unsatisfactorily as World Music. But if there is still a problem with terminology, the reality is that audiences of all ages enjoy the highly accessible mix of ethnic, traditional, jazz, hip-hop and rock music that combines to form the Womad experience.

Festival Records, distributor of Warren Fahey's Larrikin Records has announced February as World Music month and as it happens, a very large number of the Womadelaide acts are included in their releases. The next few weeks offer a perfect opportunity for us to preview some of the unfamiliar styles and sounds on this year's card.

Still central to Womad, because of the link with founder Peter Gabriel back in 1982, is the Real World record label. Based in rural Wiltshire in the UK the company has pioneered the marketing of a diverse range of artists, putting together samplers and using festivals to showcase their acts, Real World created widespread success not only for such commercially appealing performers as Geoffrey Oreyama but more esoteric musicians like sufi vocalist Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan.

Up-coming performers on Real World records include the Tenores di Bitti, four Sardinian singers whose gravelly unaccompanied polyphonic vocals are hauntingly memorable. The CD S'amore 'e mama (Real World CDRW60) will give you a sample of what's in store. The Guo brothers, Go Yue and Guo Yi, play traditional Chinese flutes and another wind instrument called a sheng. Their 1990 CD Yuan (Real WorldCDRW11) is a classic. This time the Guo Brothers will appear onstage at Womadelaide with the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, giving a new perspective on their sublime sounds.

The Justin Vali Trio from Madagascar have been a previous Womad favourite. Their vibrant singing and Vali's mandolin-like valiha can be heard on The Truth (Ny Marina) (Real WorldCDRW51) From the former Soviet Union comes the extraverted Kerem Quartet who take their folk skills to Mozart and Schubert in Classical (CDRW49). And, in the spirit of the Womad festival, comes the cross-over Afro-Celt Sound System, blending Ronan Browne and Davy Spillane's uillean pipes with synths and African talking drums. There are echoes of the long departed Third Ear Band here. Check out Volume 1 Sound Magic (CDRW61).

Often new names appear on the Womadelaide list and you have no idea what to expect. Last time Mouth Music and Jah Wobble turned out to be very likeable pop hybrids. This time, for me its Shooglenifty. A grungy folk outfit they do for Scottish traditional music what Altan and Four Men and a Dog do for Irish music. Have a listen to A Whisky Kiss (Green Trax CDTrax106)-especially the title track with its duelling banjos, dance beat drum programs, electric fiddle and funk guitar sound. This band should be fun.

Among the traditional European bands Radio Tarifa, based in Southern Spain, bring North African influences together with flamenco, Arabic and medieval sounds. Their CD Rumba Argelina (World Circuit WCD042) is one I keep returning to. They are also a band to look out for. As is Salif Keita, the star musician from Mali whose soulful vocals, consummate jazz rock big band and brilliant back-up vocalists made the final concert at the 93 Womadelaide such a buzz. I'm still playing his 1991 CD Amen (Mango CIDM 1073) produced by Weather Report's Joe Zawinul. Also is the re-release of Les Ambassadeurs Internationales (Rounder CD5053) early recordings showing Afro-Cuban influences in the development of this major talent.

Other international acts include Fun-da-mental, Afro-Asian hip hop from the UK, the Native American-influenced Lunar Drive, percussionist Joji Hirota from Japan, the Well-Oiled Sisters from Scotland and Misia, exponent of Portuguese fado music. Also, linking from the Perth Festival, we will get to see Richard Thompson and Loudon Wainwright. Since his halcyon days with Fairport Convention, Richard Thompson has produced a succession of acclaimed solo albums. The recent You? Me? Us? (Capitol) a double set -electric and acoustic (or as he calls it, Nude) -is classic Thompson. His distinctive guitar and mournful, sardonic lyrics continue to justify his cult status.

And as a soloist and recent collaborator with Thompson, Loudon Wainwright III is a great performer and a very funny man. He has been recording for more than twenty years and his latest stuff is some of his best- the live album Career Moves is a useful introduction to his style, other recent albums of note are History and 1995's Grown Man (Virgin Records) including such Wainwright quirkies as I Wish I Were a Lesbian, That Hospital and one his many self-lacerating family studies Father/Daughter Dialogue. It is terrific to have Wainwright at Womad -playing to a decent-sized Australian audience for once.

Womadelaide is not only a showcase for the world but for the best of Australian music. Eighties hit band Midnight Oil fill the spot that The Cruel Sea held last time. And while old Oils fans will be clamouring for the oldies and goodies the band's recent, more contemplative album Breathe (Sony Music) promises interesting new directions. Never a very committed Oils person, I'm finding Breathe is giving me second thoughts.

Other Australian acts include Paul Kelly, who with Lucky Oceans transformed the Womad Train into a cultural and musical exchange that has gone into legend, Christine Anu, newcomer last time, now major mainstream talent, and, from South Australia, we'll see Andrea rieniets, Dya Singh, the Borderers and Before You Were Blonde. Most overdue listing though, has to be Kev Carmody, appearing at Womadelaide for a first time. He has a fine album you can have a listen to entitled Images and Illusions (Festival) He featured impressively at the January program launch, said some choice things about reconcilation and sang his great song From Little Things Big Things Grow. And that, come to think of it , is a concept that might also describe Womadelaide itself.

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Parklife

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Womadelaide Botanic Park

Reviewed by Murray Bramwell.

It is the fourth Womadelaide and by now we have very much got the hang of it. The protocols are set, the format is immediately recognisable, the production values continue to be high. There is nothing for it but to join the throng and enjoy Adelaide's most successful musical picnic.

Womadelaide is quite unique. There can be few other events involving more than sixty thousand participants which run so amiably and smoothly. The old firm of Brookman and Brooman, Koch, Brown and Scobie -now trading as Arts Projects Australia- have made the most of their opportunity. They got Womadelaide started with the benevolent patronage of the Festival then moved it under the promotional umbrella of the Festival Centre Trust. Now the event is moving towards self-sufficiency - with a big helping hand from civic authorities and corporate sponsorship.

One of the most valuable associations is the continuing partnership with the Botanic Gardens management. Undoubtedly Botanic Park, with its grand trees and green sward, is a key to the event's success. Few music festivals can boast such a pastoral setting, unrivalled in its spaciousness and proximity to the city.

This time, the program reveals both the strengths and limitations of the Womad concept. You don't need to have read post-colonial theory to have some suspicions about the concept of World Music as a form of cultural imperialism. Just as the Botanic Gardens and the Zoo are monuments to the 19th century version, so the profusion of performance styles gathered together could be said to resemble a kind of postmodern musical menagerie.

I don't want to get too censorious here. It is just that, presented with such array, we need to be able to put the music into some kind of perspective and not merely treat it all as a succession of curiosities. Interestingly, I think the event itself has given us criteria and benchmarks. At the first Womad it was all one big blast. Youssou N'Dour, Remmy Ongala, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Geoffrey Oreyama, Trio Bulgarka. Three Womads and a train ride later, we realise just how rich that inaugural program was. Now, when we see an African big band - whether Papa Wemba, or Salif Keita, or maybe in the future, Baaba Maal- we have some reference points. And with returns, such as Salif Keita we can compare them against previous appearances.

Womad is a big number. Two hundred musicians, eighty something gigs, five venues and a whole caravanserai of food and drink stalls, flea merchants, soothsayers, cybersellers and other citizens of the New Age. As for the punters, they remain as vast and various as ever. With transferable weekend tickets the organisers confirm that some 65,000 passed through the gates during the weekend. Like its noisy sibling, Big Day Out, it is a logistical exercise of some precision. Security is vigilant but unobtrusive. The police and St Johns, low key. As well they might be. Womadelaide is a very harmonious event. No aggravation, no gross-outs, no tears before bedtime. I don't know how many people signed the much-mentioned Human Rights charter but, in the microcosm, people seem very prepared to give other people a fair go.

The size of the park and the strategic placement of the stages makes for optimum audience satisfaction. You can lie on the grass, you can stand and stomp in the modest mosh. You can get in close or graze at the edges. Stages One and Two cater to the large numbers, the tents and smaller stages are more boutique offerings. Unfortunately, at times venues Three and Four suffered some serious sound interference. At one point Colin Offord looked very exasperated by the over-long set from Christine Anu and the dance beat from the Afro Celts also made Richard Thompson's first outing a mite jittery.

Some snapshots from the weekend. A sound check at 5.30 for Radio Tarifa. They are first up on Friday night. A handful of us sit in front of Stage Two (it is smaller scale than Stage One but acoustically far superior). The Tarifas play their mix of Moorish, medieval and flamenco and a vibrancy is created for the evening. Then Guo Yue and Japanese percussionist Joji Hirota perform with the Adelaide Symphony. The ASO is getting about. ENZSO back in February, now making history at Womad. They play Guo's suite My Peking Alley, a sometimes querulous threnody to the Cultural Revolution.

The Celtic accent is strong this time around. The string band sound of Scottish outfit Shooglenifty combines Iain MacLeod's breakdown mandolins and Gary Finlayson's prepared banjo with Angus Grant's exuberant fiddle. Someone has called this Acid Croft. Certainly the cadences from A Song for Susie and A Whisky Kiss are as fetching as they are catchy. Many mark their dance cards for more of this electric ceilidh. Similarly, on Saturday, the Afro Celt Sound System create a keen following. Brainchild of RealWorld record producer Simon Emmerson, the Afro Celts mix uillean pipes, Irish whistles and Sengalese drums with a battery of synths, samples, overdubs and dance beats. It is an irresistible blend, if somewhat hostage to the vagaries of on-stage gremlins.

On Friday night Midnight Oil play to an enthralled crowd. Oils veterans hear the great works- The Time has Come, Diesel and Dust, Blue Sky High, Forgotten Years. Underwater from the new album, Breathe. Garrett, courting dangerous ironies, wears a t-shirt inscribed with the word "Bogus". He moves like a frenzied cyborg while the band pumps it out, Rob Hirst brilliant on drums, Bones Hillman ever versatile on guitar. Oils fans are ecstatic. Some of us, however, still remain unconverted to the Church of the Obvious. Also on Friday, Andrea reinets, the haunting call and response of the Tenores di Bitti and, over at the Stage Four, Ukrainian Roman Hrynkiv plays a nice line in zither.

Some Saturday moments. The Terem Quartet play Muscovite Spike Jones and the City Slickers on their steroid balalaikas, Kev Carmody sings about Travelling North and Images of London. At the tent, in a brief spell of drizzling rain, Iarla O Lionaird, druidic singer for the Afro Celts sings some lonely airs from Cuil Aodaha in County Cork while former Pogue, James McNally plays a keyboard from county Korg and a customised Overton whistle. This is a Womad highpoint. At Stage Two the Backsliders from New South Wales play some artful jug and blues and, further over at Three, Sengalese Sydneysider Bu-Baca Diop is creating a small storm. There are disappointments too. Moana and the Moahunters are an interesting combination of rap, soul and haka but falter under too much concept. Salif Keita, luminous last time round, is stodgy and remote. Christine Anu, full of promise in 1995, serves up only denatured pop.

Things crest on Sunday. The weather is perfect. The crowd has turned relaxation into an art form. Lunar Drive fail to mesh Native American chant with techno, the Afro Celts are excellent despite a serious tape glitch, Justin Vali's Trio radiates sweet good humour. Richard Thompson is more composed and shows the uninitiated what all the fuss is about. He sings the recent, Hide it Away, a witty digest Hamlet, Shoot Out the Lights and Wall of Death. When he sang Al Bowlly's in Heaven, I went there too. He is a brilliant guitar stylist and Danny Thompson (no relation) is peerless on acoustic bass.

Mara! play a delightful set with enthusiastic audience participation. Fundamental play angry Islam industrial punk with a canny parody of Sufi qawwali chanting for good measure. Resolve the past, they admonish, Too Much War. A few Womad folkies scratch their heads, others relish a chance to hear new sounds and stances.

Singer songwriters flourish at this Womad. Loudon Wainwright is at the height of his fevered powers with songs about Tonya Harding and some shrewdly funny takes on being a Dad and a Grown Man, being guilty and taking acid. He defends the Prince of Wales (POW) and wishes, once more, that he was a lesbian. He is a confessor of uncomfortable truths, his songs, Life Studies of the discreet cruelties of the American bourgeois. Paul Kelly follows with a hard-working band and a set tailored to please a hometown crowd. He sings new songs - Melting and Words and Music. How to Make Gravy sounds good all over again, so does Careless and a duet with co-composer Kev Carmody, their land rights anthem, From Little Things Big Things Grow. Telek plays at Stage Two, a better set than his first. Salif Keita returns to close Sunday night. Again, I find his band accomplished but corporate and the songs, in Swahili and French, dense and inaccessible. The lyrics are about the history of injustice in Mali, of the legendary griots and Salif Keita's journey to Paris. I want to know more, I want him to interact more. I suspect him of sulking.At this point I wonder whether the Womad format needs something approximating surtitles.

Such grumbles aside though, Womadelaide is a great event and the program is full of pleasures. But having trained our ears to hear new sounds I hope the planners take us further next time. Less electric pop, and more shading and more strangeness. Portuguese Fado performer Misia is an interesting stylist but she did not create the kind of transcendence which we experienced from Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan. I want to hear more Indian music of the calibre of Subramaniam and more European sounds like Trio Bulgarka. We need more from South America and South East Asia. And what about a first rate reggae band like Burning Spear. If it sounds like I want a lot, it is all Rob Brookman and Thomas Brooman's fault. They are the ones, after all, who have encouraged us to ask for the world.

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Adelaide Festival 1998

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Reverberations

The Seven Streams of the River Ota (98 Version) Devised by Ex Machina Directed by Robert Lepage

Ex Machina Thebarton Theatre

Reviewed by Murray Bramwell

When he first visited Hiroshima, a city, a word, synonymous with thermonuclear destruction, Quebecois director Robert Lepage expected to be dismayed by an enduring grimness. Instead he found "a lively, reconstructed modern city with large parks planted with tall trees: a vibrant night life and some of the most interesting contemporary art galleries in the world." These strong impressions prompted him to portray Hiroshima- in a production commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the bombing- not just as a city of doom, but also one of hope.

Geographically, the seven streams of the River Ota form a delta where the city of Hiroshima stands. For Canadian company Ex Machina's five and half hour epic, the seven streams are seven interlocking plays which take us from Hiroshima in 1945 to New York, Osaka, Amsterdam, the Terezin concentration camp in 1943 and return us to Hiroshima on the brink of the new century.

The opening scene is of a house in Hiroshima. It is characteristically Japanese, in natural wood tones with a tile roof, verandah, forecourt, and along the front, seven sliding screen doors. This set, designed by Carl Fillion, remains throughout the production and it is on, inside, through and beside these screens that the stories of Ota are told.

Luke O'Connor is a US army photographer, documenting the damage to buildings after the Hiroshima blast. He meets Nozomi, a hibakusha - bomb victim. She asks him to photograph her because there are no mirrors in her house and she doesn't know how she now looks. She has a ten year old daughter, Hanako, who has been blinded in the explosion. Luke shows Nozomi photos of his wife in Houston, and his son Jeffrey. When Luke returns with the prints, Nozomi, dressed in traditional kimono, makes love with him.

Circling this segment, entitled Moving Pictures, is the story of Madama Butterfly, living in Nagasaki- twin city of destruction- mother of a son to the American, Pinkerton who then takes the child back to America. Luke O'Connor is another conqueror, but he cannot confine himself to his orders and so, a sequence of redeeming actions- like water ripples from a stone- is set in train.

As with Lepage's 1988 Adelaide Festival show,The Dragon's Trilogy, a saga of three communities, set in Toronto and spanning some eighty years, The Seven Streams of the River Ota is a threading narrative of coincidences, reunions, consequences and karma. The stories are wish-fulfilments, they are like immigrant romances, and they choose to favour the creative against the destructive, redemption against damnation, fulfilment against regret. The characters are not driven by revenge, or a sense of entitlement, they do not see their ill fortunes as victimhood. You might say that they are without a politics - but, in the context of Lepage's work and its cumulative theatrical effect, that is unfairly prosaic.

It is New York 1965. The Hiroshima house is now three rooms in a tenement, we peer in, as we do figures in a Hopper painting. The mood in this second section is upbeat. The joint is jumping with beat poets and jazzoids. Luke O'Connor is watching the World Series. He is dying of leukemia and is being nursed by his son Jeffrey, a troubled young man who clashes with another man -a Japanese American also named Jeffrey.

Seven Streams continues in this way. There are continuing motifs. Like the shoes in The Dragon's Trilogy, or in the case of Ota - the performing arts and photography. American Jeffrey needs money and sells his father's camera to Japanese Jeffrey, whom he later learns is his brother. An unprocessed camera plate provides a connection. In the tenement bathroom, scene of jazz rehearsals, ablutions, crises and reconciliations, Jeffrey O'Connor teaches Jeffrey Yamashita how to develop photos. Later Ada, a Dutch woman who also stays briefly in the tenement, finds Luke's photo of Nozomi in a collection in a war museum. Jeffrey, in Amsterdam and dying of AIDS, gives the book to his Japanese brother who describes it to his blind sister.

Robert Lepage and his company have created a work of extraordinary detail and fluency. The pacing varies -from the ceremonially slow in the first establishment story to the giddier pace ofWords, the fourth section and The Interview, number six. The settings and use of panels have an overtly filmic effect. It might look like a little house in Hiroshima but we are actually watching Ota in widescreen. And the strong narrative connections- we become quite hooked on finding out what is going to happen next- have all the compulsive through-line of a TV mini-series.

The performances are quite various - from caricature comic acting to low key cinematic rhythms. The nine members of the ensemble work apparently effortlessly through the evening. Normand Bissonette is excellent as Luke and Jeffrey, Normand Daneau, nicely restrained as Jeffrey Yamahita and Martina Bovet has a melancholy stillness as Ada. In the pivotal roles as Hanako and the young Jana Capek, the magician's assistant in Terezin camp, Marie Eykel is memorably vivid. Seen here also in 1988 for The Dragon's Trilogy, Richard Frichette and Marie Gignac provide satiric energy as the ambassador Lapointe and Patricia Hebert, actress turned anchorperson.

Seven Streams of the River Ota is a fine achievement. As these characters, many of them artists - musicians, singers, actors, dancers, translators- zigzag the globe, their connections and coincidences are both mythic and strangely credible. If the links from the blind translator to the Buddhist Jew to the Quebecois bhuto dancer seem, in description, fanciful or laboured- be assured that Robert Lepage and Ex Machina have created a current of experience and destiny that is as surprising, refreshing, unexpected and fluid as the River Ota itself.

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Design Fault

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The Architect's Walk Daniel Keene

Red Shed Company Arts Theatre

Such was his sense of manifest destiny that Hitler's architect, Albert Speer, drew artist's impressions of the buildings of the Reich as two thousand year old ruins. Much later, in an interview for European TV, Speer observed, like a naughty schoolboy, that he was glad the Fuhrer was not around any more. He would not be pleased with Speer's work, it was all built of such inferior concrete that it crumbled after only twenty years.

It is characteristic of Speer that he would talk of Hitler like just another fractious client. For more than forty years after the war, including the nineteen years he spent in Spandau prison, the most Speer would admit was that he had given "tacit approval" to the atrocities of the regime. His capacity to displace responsibility and reconstruct reality enabled him to escape execution at Nuremberg. He also maintained this view to his two "confessors" - Georges Casalis, the French Calvinist priest at Spandau, whose help Speer sought to become "a different man", and biographer Gitta Sereny, whose book Albert Speer: His Battle with Truth, first appeared in 1995.

In his fine new play The Architect's Walk, playwright Daniel Keene draws on Sereny and Speer's own Spandau diaries to explore the mind of a moral amnesiac. Directed by Timothy Maddock, this eerie chamber work is based around Speer's extraordinary life in Spandau. While Rudolf Hess receded into depression and kleptomania, Speer, ever buoyant, planted a garden in the prison grounds- vegetables, strawberries, and hundreds of trees -lilacs, chestnuts and hazelnuts.

He also began his Walk around the World. Establishing a walking path through his garden, he figured that thirty circuits would be the equivalent of seven kilometres a day. One morning in1954 he imagined he was walking from Berlin to Heidelberg. Then, plotting his path in his atlas, he criss-crossed Europe and Asia.

The opening scene is of Speer pacing in his garden. The set by Imogen Thomas - tall, impenetrable dark walls circling a bare stage with five thin, branchless birches stretching through the flies- is powerfully spare, an effect only intensified by Karen Norris's anhedonic lighting. And the music by Michael Smetanin adds a fidgetty, industrial jangle to the proceedings.

Keene runs two narratives through the piece. One centres on Speer's conversations with Casalis and Hess. The other is a grim fable of a forester who finds a dead woman deep in the forest and carries her to God in the hope that she will be restored. The link between Speer's model, tree garden and the terrible, unredeemable deaths of innocents in the forests of Europe works subliminally through the production. As the Chorus, Polish-born actor, Mark Gaweda creates a sorrowful threnody, augmented by soprano Alison Farr's untranslated songs based on poems by Paul Celan.

The performances are uniformly excellent. Edwin Hodgeman, replacing an injured Frank Whitten, is suitably cranky as Hess and Robert Meldrum's Casalis explores his predicament both as interrogator and someone exasperated by his task. When he abandons Speer, the prisoner asks him whether they will meet again. I hope not, Casalis replies, because then we would have to recognise one another.

As Speer, Ralph Cotterill captures the architect's opaque morality and curious optimism. It is a fine performance, never calling up our sympathy but allowing us to study his case. Cotterill gives him vigour, like a middle aged Bondi swimmer. His obtuseness is evident, as is his intelligence. And the sheer eccentricity of a world walk of 31,000 kms is both obsessive and poetic.

Timothy Maddock has brought together the disparate elements of Keene's text with compelling effect. Some aspects, like the gallows humour of the cabaret duet between Hess and Speer, don't quite work, and the roving soprano in her scarlet dress is also a risk. The accordion and drum scene- dead soldiers walking, played by Ron Pearce and John Menhennett , is creepy, though, like something from a Grosz cartoon.

But if there are unresolved effects, they are made up for by the final scene. A mirror of the opening, the solitary Speer is sweeping in his garden. His walk has taken him to America where everyone is talking about the Kennedy assassination. Speer is himself a figure in history, a history he still denies. Smetanin's score has a Glass-like modal calm and the words of the chorus remain with us - "we build and we build and we are washed away." With this inventive new Daniel Keene again proves he is our most literate playwright. The Architect's Walk is a melancholy one, but it is road well worth travelling.

The Adelaide Review, No.174, March, 1998. p.37.

Festival Notes

Published: 1998-04-01 *Adelaide Festival*

Murray Bramwell

With daylight saving over and the nights, as they say, drawing in, the Adelaide Festival, just two weeks after being squeezed back in its box, seems rather like a dream. But it was not. We do not but slumber here. It happened, and with considerable distinction.

There are a number of factors which made Robyn Archer's 1998 event such a success. The first is that again, the festival captured the attention and enthusiasm of the city. Of course, late 20th century utilitarianism requires a preamble reminding us that the festival is good for tourism, vendors, money changers and the State's bottom line. Recent history requires that the Deficit be expunged. Current ettiquette demands that the artistic director be conspicuously appreciative of sponsorship and all that that entails. But once that was attended to, the populace actually got on with the business of having a good time.

And Robyn Archer was very good on the free stuff. Thirty- something thousand trooped into the city for Flamma Flamma and for many, who saw a lot else in the program, it was a highlight. I was at The Seven Streams of Ota at the time- and not sorry to be in a theatre for longer than it takes to fly to Singapore- but I wished I could have seen Nigel Jameson's spectacle, a major public commission with sterling support from the ASO, the State Opera Chorus and numerous distinguished soloists. That a similar number turned out to Elder Park the next night for the Symphony Under the Stars and then every reader and their penguin bag was gathered for a week of literary plumage display at the Writers Week tents, were further proofs that the agora was jumping.

Unlike 1996 where Barrie Kosky constructed a program on somewhat opaque precepts- remember them ? Ecstacy, Utopia and Map ?- Robyn Archer went for a more fundamental binary. The sacred and the profane. Well not the profane, actually. You might say the troubling, the unresolved and the unjust. Grace and disgrace, harmony and chaos, transcendence and obsession.

Those elements all featured in the first weekend, with Ota, Va Yomer Va Yelech and The Architect's Walk. But, for me, the polarities were most evident between the Belgian productions, from Needcompany and Les Ballets C de la B, and the Taiwanese Cloud Gate Dance Theatre.

Putting the ph g back in Flemish both companies presented painfully abrasive works. Ballets C de la B's La Tristeza Complice -the Shared Sorrow- was as confrontational as it was accomplished. Set to the vocal music of Purcell, accompanied by a jury of accordionists, this shared sorrow is actually complicit. The images of these underclass children and misfits, painfully similar to those we avoid in our own city, is deeply disturbing, yet the physical skill and the invention of Alain Patel's choreography is also exhilarating. Needcompany's Snakesong on the other hand, turns the interrogation first on the problematic legend of Leda and the Swan and then, in Act Two, on a dysfunctional bourgeois family in full self-eviceration.

These two works, like Meg Stuart's Damaged Goods and DV8 in the 1996 program, gave us difficult, uncomfortable images to gnaw on. Luckily the sheer spectacle of Cloud Gate's The Song of the Wanderers, which I saw at a matinee in the second weekend, provided the kind of restorative nourishment we also need in a festival. The work, devised by Lin Hwai-min, is perhaps not as profound as its Buddhist reference and the invocation of Hesse's Siddhartha suggests, but the experience of the mesmerically slow movement, the melancholy harmonies of the Georgian choir and the indescribable effect of the curtains of rice, side-lit with washes of golden light, was enough to rinse the senses.

Festivals are always a mix of international hits and new works from home. And as ever, the strike rate was mixed. State Theatre's Playbox collaboration, Natural Life , was a tiresome mess which only exasperated more for suggesting connection to Marcus Clarke's novel. Director Michael Kantor and adaptor Humphrey Bower, despite the evident talents of designer Tomek Komen and composer Tyrone Landau, presented a work that is both cryptic and disagreeably mannered. The Queens Theatre, an airless sauna the night I went, probably hasn't seen worse for the term of its own very long, natural life.

Masterkey, devised and designed by Mary Moore and adapted from Masako Togawa's novel by Moore and Miriel Lenore, used Richard Back's multimedia elements with flair, and the combined Japanese and Australian cast gave us both a thriller and a vivid mood piece on the lives of women in a Tokyo boarding house. The visual effects, supervised by former Handspan whiz and now Patch director, Ken Evans, were often magical and the use of wardrobes to describe and define the solitary lives of the women was inspired.

Also carefully realised was Imaggini D'Addio/Tracking Time from Doppio Teatro/Parallelo. Inventively using public/private space at the Railway Station, James Coulter's stylish design was, however, let down by the undeveloped text and the lack of quality in the performances. Tracking Time was more like marking time.

With Possessed, the Meryl Tankard Australian Dance Theatre returned to their Barossa Music Festival collaboration with the Balanescu Quartet. The stainless steel wine vats remained but the work now writ large for the Ridley Centre at Wayville, Possessed has gained a new composition from Alexander Balanescu and Tankard has extended the work for her reconstituted troupe. Over-extended, at times you might say. There were some thrilling aeronautics and dazzling tableaux but frequently the dancers seemed apprehensive and under-rehearsed and the live sound from the quartet, diminished greatly by the absence of Clare Connors, was in the first half, lamentably poor.

Not so for Black on White, the Heiner Goebbels project with Ensemble Modern. Rarely have I heard complex performed sound so splendidly managed and the fluency and unexpected playfulness of the musicians caught me off guard. I was braced for something rather more earnest and programmatic, so the whimsies of whistling kettles and self perpetuating kotos, combined with varied but accessible musical styles from Miles Davis funk to acoustic percussion to brass and accordion chamber work, proved as pleasurable as they were surprising.

Festivals are, by their very nature volatile, events. And rarely do we experience so much, and so many contrasts, in such a short time. Unlike our usual serial consumption of performances at other periods in the year, during a festival everything tumbles into everything else and as the week progresses so do our expectations and standards. It is a rapid curve and that is why judgements are often brisk and unequivocal. Not everything is easily assimilated. the Belgian works are still bubbling away in the back of my mind for instance, as are the various and variable remnants I have of The Seven Streams of the River Ota.

Unlike many I talked to, I found Fiona Shaw's rendition of Eliot's The Waste Land, over-theatricalised, imperceptive of the text and worryingly complict with the poet's supercilious and well-documented cruelty. No-one can change the lines in A Game of Chess, but Ms Shaw might have presented the speech about Lil and her troubles with less music hall cliche than Eliot himself did. The lighting was delectable and the opening section bode well but The Waste Land, as Pound's edit revealed, is not improved by doing the police in so many different voices.

Another disappointment for me was Wendy Houston's Haunted Daunted and Flaunted. With her credentials from DV8, I was enticed but despite her dexetrous movement I found the use of script irritating and undeveloped. I should have been warned by the clumsy assonance in the title. Houston moved well, but we had a problem. The text clunked, plunked and flunked.

Festivals are always one person's fish and someone else's poisson. That's what makes them so stimulating and memorable. They are also important for what they do for a city's sense of itself. Elder Park never saw so many fireballs, artists, weddings, loaves and tommy ruffs . And this time the image abroad was not of the Hills hoist but the accordion. A friend recently sent me a Larson cartoon. Welcome to Heaven, here is your harp, read the first frame. Welcome to Hell here is your accordion the second. Well, before the Festival, that was me. Now, after the Squeezebox, another hugely successful monument to the strategic beneficence of giving something away in order to refuel interest in the ticketed offerings, I am converted to this, the Toyota Crown of musical instruments. What next, Robyn Archer, for the now much-awaited Festival 2000 ? Will you be teaching us how to yodel ?

The Adelaide Review, April, 1998.

Fringe Reflections

Published: 1998-04-01 *Adelaide Fringe*

Murray Bramwell

Since its relocation in the Rundle Street precinct the Festival Fringe has, seemingly, had a charmed life. But I say seemingly, because sometimes in among the razzle dazzle it is hard to work out exactly what is actually going on. In identifying the success of the Fringe you wonder, in the words of the poet, how you might tell the dancer from the dance ? There is certainly a lot of action in town. The nights are balmy, the living easy and, by the look of the non-stop trade in cafes and pubs, the cotton is as high as an auditor's eye. But while we have heard plenty about the profit margins on Rundle Street, it would seem, that for many Fringe events, things are not so rosy.

To an extent this is inevitable. The program, unsolicited and uncurated, is on a scale of competition that would trouble even Malthus. When the La Mama six-pack from Melbourne called its season Survival of the Fittest, it carried only a partial irony. Take them as a case in point. Despite strong reviews and three week seasons the La Mama shows fared only modestly well. The Producers' Shed was but two blocks from the epicentre but that ,maybe, was already a bridge too far. After all, haunts like the Fringe Club looked all but desolate some nights, the attempts at Fringe West in Gouger Street pretty much packed up, and reports were that the Big Red late sessions were not well supported either.

There have been other glitches as well. There was a sense of an infrastructure in siege. Despite valiant efforts by operators the phone lines did not handle bookings briskly enough, there were internet delays and some customers reported errors and misinformation. And with a printed program that only became more impenetrable as time went on, the problem of identifying particular events in the general ruck became almost impossible.

You couldn't tell where acts had come from, or really what they were offering. International performers were mixed in with local listings and only the Big Red events appeared to enjoy an advantage when it came to publicity. Ticket prices, while generally cheaper than the Festival, were steep enough for punters to want to avoid taking risks, and, if conversations I had were anything to go by, the door price for late shows at Big Red dampened any chance that the cargo cult container venue would repeat the Red Square vibe in Kosky's 96 Festival.

A number of patterns are now evident in the Fringe. The headline acts, boosted by the familiarity of television, will predictably take a big chunk of the box office. Jim Rose, now successfully mainstreaming from the grotesquely arcane little lounge act he used to be, captured the gawping classes, especially when he talked up his X Files and Simpsons connections. The Three Canadians, the Scared Weird Little Guys, Tokyo Shock Boys and Judith Lucy all reclaimed their 1996, and even 1994, constituencies. And acts like Colin Hay, Cassandra Wilson, the Indigo Girls and Kate Ceberano, The Blind Boys of Alabama and Charlie Musselwhite all proved to be popular one night stands.

Then there are those unexpected hits. The Fat Elvises, who I was sorry to miss, played to full houses at Big Red. Lightning Strike, with its Carrick Hill production of Much Ado About Nothing just about had to beat back the crowds with a stick- proving that not everything had to be in town to get an audience. Word of mouth was also good for the North American Foreign Legion program at Madlove. Perhaps the most talked about show, and one I knew I somehow would be thwarted from seeing, was Dawson Nichols' I Might Be Edgar Allan Poe. The buzz on Nichols was very enthusiastic - as it was for Escher's Hands from Seattle-based Theatre Simple and for Stephen Rappaport's second one-man show, The Chocolate Quarry.

Also in the theatre program was Brink Productions' lively version of Jez Butterworth's wide boy caper Mojo, playing at the Red Shed. Racily directed by Benedict Andrews and designed in suitably tacky retro woodgrain by Imogen Thomas, Mojo ensured that Brink again gathered the accolades for best production. And the praise was well deserved. Mojo was a good choice.

A fast, smart, blackly comic account of a gang of hoods in a London nightclub, the play is like a cracked partial version of Hamlet, with Justin Ratcliffe as the psychopath Baby, seeking revenge for his bisected father against the usurper Mickey, played with dour menace by Paul Moore- while the Rosencrantz and Guildenstern figures, Sweets and Potts, performed with ferocious deadpan by David Mealor and Richard Kelly, try and cut Skinny Luke (a macabrely zany John Molloy) out of the action.

Also performed in repertory with Mojo was Harold Pinter's creepy two hander The Dumb Waiter. Directed by Gina Tsikouras and played, in Emma Peel mod black, by Lizzy Falkland and Catherine Bishop, the tensions of Pinter's bleak little tale of two hit-persons were engagingly established. Marred only by occasional vocal excess, the performances were nicely paced and coolly captured the excruciations of Pinter's cat and mouse dialogue.

With these two shows Brink show themselves in fine form. The revival of The Dumb Waiter paired with Mojo, itself a kind of cartoon of Pinter, reminds us of the company's flair for selecting repertoire. Mojo goes to Belvoir Street in Sydney sometime in May and there are plans for Melbourne also. Audiences better watch out. Brink have got their Mojo working- and this production will slay them.

Another highlight in the final week of the Fringe is the comedian Rich Hall. In a program dominated by old faces, and some rather callow new ones, Hall, who originally hails from Montana, shows why he has already become a popular fixture at the Melbourne Comedy Festival. His show at the Nova Cinema is a shrewd blend of local observation, improvisation and wonderfully dry, slow moving schtick.

A sometime writer for David Letterman, Rich Hall has echoes of the young Walter Matthau. Serious, lugubrious and unmistakably intelligent, Rich Hall works the room with a kind of amiable menace. Its a fine line between comedy and stalking, he quips as he interrogates the front row about their jobs, their partners and their own black little hearts.

Refering to a display map of the world Hall does some radical geography. He removes Australia back to England- "we're ho-ome." He shifts New Zealand to Wales, so that a country of vowels can meet a country of consonants, and he renames countries in the African continent after famous snack foods so that Americans might remember them better. Then he reads listings from the Trading Post, makes up a song based on a garage sale and then, in a series of non sequiturs, starts a brilliant riff about the Hubble telescope and how it was accidentally installed in a Buick.

Greg Fleet's Underwater World was a hit and miss thing compared to the considerably more together Thai Die in the last Fringe and at least some of the material we had heard in the Space cabaret season in January. Janei Anderson's Lucy Fell From Heaven, a monologue with music about angels and ingenues falling out of thrall, crossed from fragile into feeble as the material melted like wax from its wings. It was a sweet idea but I fear too ethereal for this world.

So just as well as for Rich Hall who provided some of my best Fringe moments along with Mind's Eye, Legs on the Wall, the Blind Boys of Alabama and Clarence Fountain, Jerome Pride in Self, Stephen Rappaport in the Museum of Contemporary Art, Rod Quantock in Kennettville, The Master and Magarita and the Mojo boys complaining about the white pills making their piss black. The Fringe is a terrific vortex of a festival and Barbara Wolke and her associates have done well. But given that it all depends on the goodwill and commitment of participants let's hope that with all this new-tech on offer, the real lines of communication can be improved for next time round.

The Adelaide Review, No. 175, April, 1998. p.28

World View

Published: 1999-03-01 *WOMADelaide*

Womadelaide Botanic Park

Reviewed by Murray Bramwell

If ever an event is greater than the sum of its parts it is Womadelaide. Now in its fifth edition since inception in 1992 it is the splendid result of careful cultivation and management. If I use a horticultural image it is because Womad, in the verdant environs of Botanic Park, is like a well-tended garden. Its success is a reminder that events need good planning and infrastructure. They also need good resources and continuity.

Without the initial support of the skilled machine that was the Adelaide Festival team seven years ago it is likely that Womad, like many of its counterparts in the Northern Hemisphere would have toppled. Without the ongoing support of the Adelaide Festival Centre the three day fixture could have gone the way of many a good idea in the music industry. What is unique about Womadelaide is that it is a music event with the production values of theatre. It also remains the cherished project of its original Adelaide team, Artistic Director Rob Brookman, Executive Director Ian Scobie and Marketing Director Colin Koch. Add to that a continuing rapport with Thomas Brooman from Womad UK and the considerable expertise and grunt of the Adelaide Festival Centre crew and you can see why this World Music festival might well meet world's best practice.

With attendances up ten percent and peaking at over thirty thousand on the Saturday and Sunday nights, Womad is more appealing than ever. And its success is sufficiently unusual to warrant some scrutiny. The continuity of artistic direction and skilled infrastructure is part of the reason. The location is another. Botanic Park is not just a handsome venue, it is enviably close to the city centre and the continuing support of the Adelaide City Council and the Adelaide Zoo has given Womad a privileged place among major events.

But it is the buzz, the vibe, the ambience, the atmosphere -whatever your particular social subgroup might call it- that attracts 65,000 visits over the weekend. Whether locals or the astonishing 33% coming from interstate, the Womad crowd gets broader in its demographic and more devoted in its attendance as time goes on. Estimates suggest that 90% of this year's turnout had been before- and, when surveyed, punters invariably insist that they will be returning again. And you can see why. The quality of facilities and services, the mix of the weather- this time, hot days with well nigh perfect evenings- and the extraordinary equanimity of the crowd is unmatched almost anywhere.

There can be few places which are safer and more harmonious than Womad. Parents can let their kids roam, with mobile phone numbers pinned to their Oshkoshs, teenagers can mosh it down the front at Stage One, while the less energetic can fan themselves under the Moreton Bay figs and watch Angus Watt's sumptuously scarlet and saffron coloured banners play in the breeze. For one weekend in February Botanic Park becomes an internment camp for pleasure where workaholics, career paranoids, the worried well and the glum at heart, can all revive and revitalise in their own daft and unconditionally regarded way.

And of course there is the Music. There are, as usual, two alternating main stages, as well as two smaller venues numbered three and four, plus workshop tents and a faraway tree known, somewhat ickily, as Dingly Dell. So many sites make for an awful lot of parallel play and only the most task-oriented are likely to get to more than about two thirds of what is on offer. Interestingly, the program allows for a number of possible Womad narratives. There is drumbeat and rhythm for those who want it, there is acoustic sound and strings for others. There is also a vocal thread to be followed and local talent to be checked out and loyally supported.

This year is, as usual, one of highs and some lows. In fact, you only need (or can absorb) five or six really peak experiences for Womad to be a success. After that there are the curiosities, whimsies, near misses, the also-rans and a few stinkers.

Friday opens expansively with the Adelaide Symphony's performance of Shaun Davey's The Brendan Voyage with soloist Liam O'Flynn. Re-telling the story of the Little Coracle that Could, Davey's piece verges on Irish schmaltz but O'Flynn's resonant uillean pipes fill the twilight with such plangent sound that it is churlish to quibble. Kila, the other Celtic component this year, prove to be a disappointment alongside the jiggery of Shooglenifty and techno wizardry of Afro Celt in 1997. Playing a mix of calypso and gaelic reels, Kila work hard to be a goodtime band but despite their catchcry Tog e go bog e (take it easy) I can't really take them at all. Brothers Snodaigh and associates, notably Eoin Dillon on pipes and the under-represented Dee Armstrong on fiddle, have heaps of talent but, in their first set at least, they really don't hit their straps.

Another disappointment is Bangarra's set on Stage Two. Presenting a discrepant combination of stylised indigenous dance and accomplished but derivative nineties r'n'b ballads this influential company seems to be playing down to a broad audience that in fact needs no concessions at all. Gjallorhorn, the Finnish band with a repertoire of sagas about sea witches and such are also both impenetrable and unengaging.

A visual focus on Friday night is the Drummers of Burundi, whose relentless energy and precision around the central inkiranya drum is enough to kick-start even the most reluctant endorphins. But like the Mornington Island Dancers, they leave us with a sense of spectacle rather than of cultural understanding.

By Saturday the program begins to lift. Samoan band Te Vaka play a fine set, and the African Gypsies, led by Ray Phiri, re-create something of their Graceland sound, ably augmented by an understated appearance by former Roxy Music guitarist Phil Manzanera. But it is Oliver Mtukudzi's workshop which gives us a bit of reality. Talking quietly about his experiences as a musician in Zimbabwe, he raises questions about the nature and ownership of culture. He asks implicitly what we are doing at events such as Womad which, while often creating genuine cultural exchange, can also perpetuate a 19th century spirit of colonial exoticism.

Saturday night is full sweet sounds. After sitting through a long sound check delay I only get a glimpse of fusion chant and percussion bandleader Trilok Gurthu. Instead I head round to Stage Four to hear Argentinian bandeneon virtuoso, Cesar Stroscio perform with guitarist Claude Enriquez and bass player Hubert Tissier. Opening with Cinco de abril, a sprightly accordion tango melody counterpointed by guitar and bowed bass, the musicians create an effortless chemistry. Their set, under a clear night sky, is a sheer delight.

So is the performance on Sunday from Ernest Ranglin, Jamaican guitarist and godfather to Trenchtown ska and reggae. His latest album, in collaboration with members of the Baaba Maal band is called In Search of the Lost Riddum, As far as I can tell that riddum has been well and truly found as Ranglin, with his classy fluid guitar style and keyboard and rhythm quartet, explores both above and below the bassline. It is a flawless display from an artist of tremendous grace and dignity and ranks for many of us as an all time Womad favourite.

There are some excellent sets on the final day full of musical surprises and epiphanies. There's the workshop from oud player Yair Dalal, the santoor jugalbandi from Shiv Kumar Sharma and his son Rahul, the spirited sounds of Adelaide's own Fruit, the electicism of Tulipan, there's some Whaling from Dave Dobbyn and his collaboration with Kaha for Slice of Heaven. And later, Yunchen Lhamo's chanting and the spritzy Andrews Sisters routines of Cuban singers, Las Perlas del Son.

But the final session from Baaba Maal is hard to beat. Opening with selections from the Nomad Soul album and alternating the vivacious talking drum rhythms of Cherie and Yolela (Africans Unite) with acoustic duets from longterm collaborator, guitarist Mansour Seck, Baaba Maal's eleven piece band is orchestral in scale and captivating to watch. Walking across Botanic Park late on Sunday night before the set is over, we pick our way through a crowd variously energised, bleary, blissed and replete. Some of Ranglin's band have joined the stage for the encore. You can hear the opening lines, in English, of Souka Nayo (I Will Follow You) then Maal's penetrating, arcing vocal followed by the chorus and the sax- heavy drum and synth beats. It is pop music, it is Sengalese music, it is familar and distinctly different. It is also the sound, momentarily at least, of a new world.

The Adelaide Review, March 1999.

2000s Reviews

Theatre - Adelaide Festival

Published: 2000-03-05 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Murray Bramwell

Mizumachi Ishinha Theatre Company. Written and directed by Yukichi Matsumoto. Designed by Yuji Hayashida. Music and sound by Kazuhisa Uchihashi and Kazuyuki Matsamura. Lighting by Kiyokazu Kakizaki Torrens Parade Ground Adelaide, until 17 March.

Mizumachi is the water city, a floating shanty town in the emerging industrial city of Osaka in1905. Here poor rural migrants come from the Southern Islands of Ryukyu to find work, ekeing out a living along the canals, pilfering iron and collecting junk. Orphaned, and alone, Nao meets Takeru when he rescues her sister Kana from drowning in the canal. Yoshimatsu grows melons, others keep pigs. Masamori is carefully building a model battleship, a group of men get drunk on memories of home.

But like the inhabitants of Coketown in Dickens' Hard Times, or figures in L.S. Lowry's industrial landscapes, the characters are dwarfed by the enormity of the machine culture around them. In a specially constructed outdoor venue in Adelaide's centrally-located Torrens parade ground, Ishinha's director Yukichi Matsumoto and designer Yuji Hayashida have created a performance space more like a movie soundstage than a theatre.

It is vast. A widescreen vista of a city of soot and smoke. Under lowering black clouds and against a giant pop-up picture book skyline of chimneys and dark satanic mills, the characters act out their tiny destinies against starvation and plague, typhoons and clearance by government edict. Mizumachi presents us with a complete world of shanties, house boats, foundries and spinning mills. And there is water everywhere- a canal one minute, an entire stage flooded the next.

There is, however, an energy and buoyancy to the lives of these new Osakans. The opening scene has a vibrancy as the creamy Edwardian parasols and top hats of the dignatories are contrasted by the brown cloth caps and aprons of the worker army. It is like a Chinese opera from the Cultural Revolution, driven by pulsing techno beats, garnished, in live performance by composer and musician, Kazuhisa Uchihashi.

The forty-one strong cast moves in mass choreography accompanied by chants and counting, their repetitions a mix of constructivist movement Meyerhold would have been proud of, and perky dance routines from girl pop bands like Shonen Knife and middle period Kylie. Which is to say that Mizumachi is a richly tangled mix of contemporary performance and music styles. Described as a Jan Jan Opera- refering to a working class district in Osaka- Mizumachi communicates with its pantomime acting, its danceclub music, and the sentimentality of its themes.

When there is individual dialogue we are desperately diving into our synopses for help. When there are big production numbers - entitled The Furnace, The Spinning Factory and Typhoon - we are in the grip of elements of music, design, movement that are universally, and edibly operatic. Adelaide is the lucky first audience to witness this extraordinary production- undoubtedly, a Festival high-water mark.

The Australian Arts Review, March 5, 2000.

Big hArt Works

Published: 2000-03-15 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Director: Scott Rankin

Care Park, Moore Street Adelaide until 17 March

The Theft of Sita

Director : Nigel Jamieson, Music: Paul Grabowsky and I Wayan Gde Yudane, Puppetry: I Made Sidia and Peter Wilson, Design: Julian Crouch and Reg Mombassa

Botanic Park, Adelaide until 17 March.

The cavernous warehouse venue is lit up with activity. Painting easels surround the walls, a dozen young people hold up their portraits for viewing, a large expanse of red earth is being bricked over with pavers, one kid is running on the spot, another is sitting for artist Robert Hannaford, tribal dancers mingle with young Chinese performers. A crew shoots live footage and sound. Techno beats pour through speakers. Someone steps forward to a microphone. Definition of a person, of work, of apathy, of running.

Director Scott Rankin, complete with headset and clipboard, barks out cues with abstract titles- Presentation of a Visual Image, Structural Device A. On various screens clips of young people describe experiences of neglect, abuse, isolation and loss.A young woman etches black lines into her face to let the pain out. In one of many short film narratives, a young man repeats the abusive relationship patterns of his father.

This is Big hArt Works, a public report of an eighteen month process of consultation with one thousand young people from twelve communities in rural and regional Australia. It is a compelling experience both for its emotional directness and its quality of presentation. A number of high profile artists contribute- Roger Woodward narrates a story and plays some tinny piano, actor Kerry Armstrong reads for a screen test, even Robyn Archer arrives by fast car for some quick vocals. But these cameos are deliberately ironic and self-deprecating, highlighting the painfully experienced truth of the young performers.

Often community theatre has to trade craft for sincerity and short circuits social urgency into harangue. What is distinctive in Big hArt Works is Rankin's skill in framing the understatement and quiet dignity of these emotionally articulate young people. As the company boldly says, Big hArt Works is a statement not a title. And they are right. The performers have gained from this project. And so have we. Not so much because we have been taught, but because it makes us want to learn.

The Theft of Sita is also a collaboration, between Australian and Indonesian artists- and conceived at a time when politically the two societies have been estranged. Derived from the Sanskrit epic, the Ramayana, the story of Sita tells how the wife of King Rama is abducted by the demon Rawanna and held in the city of Lanka before being rescued by Rama and his faithful followers.

To this story, director Nigel Jamieson has not only grafted extensive current political and social reference, he has taken the Indonesian shadow play techniques of the Wayan Kulit and added designs from Mambo artist Reg Mombassa, while the traditional gamelan group has been augmented by members and associates of Paul Grabowsky's impro ensemble the Australian Art Orchestra.

The marriage of styles is intriguing and often delightful. The delicate detailing of traditional puppets is contrasted by Mombassa's boisterous, farting creations while the dexeterous Indonesian and Australian dalang/puppeteers merge ancient clowns like Twalen and Merdah with cartoon gags of the likes of Ren and Stimpy.

Vocalist Shelley Scown beautifully echoes the suling flute lines and the combined ensemble creates both harmony -and cacophony, to match the many punch-ups and dangers that Sita's rescuers face as the forest is hacked down to make Australian toilet paper, cultivation is disrupted by adventure tourism and the cities become the corrupt domain of Rawanna.

There is clever satire here - the demon in his stretch limo and Sita being sold on the stock exchange, for instance. But the narrative, despite inventive screen projections and the gusto of the performances, wears thin as the social and political comment falls into repetitive denunciation. The Wayan Kulit has a narrative which enables it to meander, but in The Theft of Sita, Nigel Jamieson has created something much more hyperactive and, to work best, it needs to steal past more briskly. The Australian, Arts on Friday, March, 2000.

Womadelaide Returns

Published: 2001-02-01 *WOMADelaide*

Previewed by Murray Bramwell

It is February and the “off-year” for the Adelaide Festival, so it must be time for Womadelaide. This is the sixth incarnation -including the Pimba train ride and the McLaren Vale boutique version in 1998- and expectation is now higher than ever. This event has come a long way since its inception as part of the 1992 Festival of Arts. Back then, director Rob Brookman had originally intended to use Belair National Park as the venue but the CFS vetoed the idea for safety reasons. The move to Botanic Park was a last minute stroke of genius and it is now clear that its continued availability has ensured that Womadelaide has become a significant drawcard for the city, one of those blue chip major events claimed by politicians, tourism promoters and various other purveyors of things Sensational.

Fortunately, though, Womad is sufficiently idiosyncratic to resist corporate takeover. Amongst the estimated 65,000 visits to the park are represented all generations, many tribes, and most demographics.. Womad is a great big picnic with extraordinary music, high production values, quality amenities and skilfully unobtrusive management. Few events on this scale are as relaxed, amiable and safe for everyone in the perimeter.

For all these reasons, the recidivist rate is high. In 1999 it was estimated that 90% had been to Womad before. Which accounts for the ritualised aspects of the occasion. The layout is reassuringly familiar, the protocols kept scrupulously intact, even the weather somehow manages to be ideal- sunny days and sublimely balmy evenings. You’d have to say, all things considered, it is recipe guaranteed to work every time.

Not surprisingly, after five Womadelaides in nine years, the audiences have become very au fait with a remarkable range of music. Adelaide crowds have seen some of the very best, including the late Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Subramaniam, Remmy Ongala and the Guo Brothers as well as pop luminaries such as Peter Gabriel and Crowded House. We have seen esoteric tuva vocalists, Sardinian folk groups, Cuban son-sters, klezmer exponents and Bulgarian a cappella. What used to be, unsatisfactorily, called World Music has now become music from around the world, a world now expanded to include the peripheries of Europe, Africa and Asia. There is still,of course, a tendency towards the exotic, of a sort of musical zoo, where the traditions, political context and cultural integrity of the material are at risk. Zimbabwean singer Oliver Mtukudzi raised some of these issues in workshops back in 1999. He is back this year and it will good to hear more of what he has to say.

Looking over the program there is much to get enthused about. There is a strong Australian component and, consistent with Rob Brookman’s creditably forthright statements on Reconciliation at last November’s media launch, the inclusion of distinguished Aboriginal performers such as the Narbalek band from Arnhem Land, David Blanasi and the White Cockatoo Performing Group and, backed by Karma County, sixties crooner Jimmy Little will also be back on the telephone. The Stiff Gins, three stylish vocalists from Sydney, promise to rival the now-disbanded Tiddas- that is, if the media preview is anything to go by. Art works from the Anangu Pitjantjara artists from the State’s far North will be on display as will the National Reconciliation Sea of Hands project.

Among the traditional performers is Meng Pichenda, a Cambodian vocalist,she is accompanied by Khmer violinist Ieng Sithul. Perhaps the most esoteric instrument at Womad will be the duduk,a unique reed instrument performed by Armenian Divyan Gasparayan. He is something of a cross-over performer by all accounts -having worked on film soundtracks with Peter Gabriel, as well as collaborations with Kronos Quartet and - yikes- Lionel Ritchie. Another esoteric instrument getting the pop treatment is the gaita or Galician bagpipes played by Carlos Nunez who has performed with the Chieftains and Ry Cooder. His recent CD Mayo Longo has me a little cautious- bombastically overproduced, it even features Roger Hodgson, formerly of Supertramp. Nunez has been called the Jimi Hendrix of the pipes. I hope he manages to rise above the desperation of copywriters.

Among the women performers we have Argentinian Barbara Luna who has strong tango and Afro-Cuban influences. Her CD A La Vida, a la Muerte recorded in Paris in 1998 is well worth a listen. She should be a smoky late night highlight. Chava Alberstein is a kind of Israeli Joni Mitchell whose songwriting spans a variety of genres and a range of subjects from the personal to the political. She sings mostly in Yiddish and Hebrew - I hope we have the benefit of some translation - like the lyric sheets to her recent album Crazy Flower.

Rokia Traore from Mali is an artist of great delicacy and range and her CD Wanita is a definite purchase from the record tent. Traore’s lilting vocal with haunting percussion and guitar accompaniment makes compelling listening and, in the Malian griot tradition she sings in praise of poets and speaks out against injustice and political corruption. Again, it is to hoped that some of her songs will be introduced in English. Her delicate musicality is often in stark constrast to the sentiments in her lyrics.

For this reason Femi Kuti, leading proponent of Nigerian Afrobeat, should be a lively act, equal to the great African rhythm bands of Salif Keita and Baaba Maal. Kuti sings in a kind of English patois on his recent release, Shoki Shoki, a terrifically high octane bag of funk grooves, high profile horns and tireless congas. His band is called The Positive Force and they are well-named.

I have often thought that Womad has been slow to include blues, cajun, bluegrass and other North American traditional and roots music. The inclusion of Bob Brozman, master of the National Resonator guitar is most welcome. Brozman is a superb guitar stylist whether in Hawaiian forms, ragtime or Delta blues . He also has some of the tent show theatricality of Leon Redbone and Roy Bookbinder. I have been listening in amazement to his 1992 CD A Truckload of Blues (Rounder) He has a ferocious technique and his take, even on the hallowed repertoire of Robert Johnson, is unerring.

The return of guitar wizard, Richard Thompson, is, for many, tantamount to the Second Coming. The founder of Fairport Convention has produced a succession of solo albums each more dazzling than the last. He is a consummate song writer as his most recent album Mock Tudor yet again attests.

Irish band Flook!, if their CD Flatfish is any indication, are a flute-and-whistle driven instrumental quartet whose waltzes, jigs and Sligo reels should provide the kind of gaelic knees-up we have come to expect from bands like Kila and Shooglenifty. Which brings us to the Afro-Celt Sound System - Simon Emmerson’s dance beat phantasmagoria featuring Irish singer Iarla O’Lionnaird, African drummers N’Faly Kouyate and Moussa Sissokho, accordionist James McNally and keyboardist and programmer Martin Russell. The Afro Celts first visited in 1997 just before their first CD, which eventually sold more than 250,000 units, turned into Peter Gabriel’s RealWorld label’s first hit record. Pernickity about their stage set-up The Afro Celts caused their share of schedule delays last time round - but the wait was worth it. Unlike some of the soft pop mish-mash music which occasionally turns up on the Womad circuit, the Afro Celts are a genuinely original hybrid and an exciting one. Their appearance at Womad is serious recognition of the place of electronica in the music map- as is the WoZone, based at Adelaide Uni and featuring a range of DJs including Emmerson himself.

The Adelaide Symphony will make another appearance at Womad. Last time it was to perform The Brendan Voyage by Irish composer Shaun Davey. This time it is a collaboration with versatile French violinist Gilles Apap. Also, recently announced, is the nine piece Cuban band Sierra Maestre. The Havana based outfit will appear exclusively in Adelaide and should provide some Buena Vistas of their own. Finally, mention should be made of local Adelaide favourites Fruit, the formerly Waving Not Drowning, David Bridie whose new album Act of Free Choice has been turning heads and ears and John Butler, a guitarist and singer somewhere in the key of Ben Harper. He will, it seems, be one of very many to watch out for.

“Womadelaide previewed” The Adelaide review, No.209, February, 2001. pp.33-34.

Big World

Published: 2001-03-24 *WOMADelaide*

Womadelaide 2001 Botanic Park

Reviewed by Murray Bramwell

Womadelaide Mark Six has come and gone and its remarkable continuity is again assured. The key to its success is clear. It is well-funded, well managed and has a modus operandi that not only works but is shared by the up-to-25,000 crowd that fills Botanic Park at its peak attendance. Few outdoor festivals enjoy the support that Womad has - from Government departments, quangos, NGOs, arts organisations, Botanic gardeners, St John, the police, caterers and stall holders, all the many contributors to its organisation.

And the nurturing is well-placed . For a fraction of the cost of a car race, even an obscure American franchised car race, Womadelaide is one of the few ongoing ventures that the Festival Centre Trust can be proud of. It grew out of the 1992 Adelaide Festival and enjoyed its patronage at a very critical R and D stage. If it had been a stand alone, break-even venture first, or even second, time round, it would have folded before it could prove itself. Now, it is a unique summer event, and one that is tailor-made to its Adelaide location. There is a lesson here, in patience and longer-term return.

Arts Projects Australia - comprised of former senior executives of the AFCT - continues to manage and sustain Womadelaide. The connections Rob Brookman first forged with Thomas Brooman of Womad UK have consolidated to the point where the Adelaide event is now what benchmarkers might call world music best practice. That continues in 2001 with director Ian Scobie, the dedicated commitment from Festival Trust staff and skilled production contractors such as Geoff Cobham and David Arbon.

The buzz for this year's event has been better than ever. Organisers report brisker pre-weekend sales and closed the gates on a 25,000 plus crowd on Saturday night. Even with 39 degree heat on the Sunday the total attendances for the weekend reach 67,000. Attracting numbers like that while maintaining passenger comfort is a real achievement. It is also helped by the fact that the Womad crowd is the most benign collection of citizens. They don't all have to be in the front row, they don't drink themselves insensible in the hot sun. They sometimes have unrealistic hopes that audiences should remain seated during performances, but they also have a creditably diverse and tolerant notion of what constitutes a good time.

So, enough about infrastructure, arts politics and the well-trained punters, what about the music ? Six events in nearly ten years have dug deep into the global entertainment market and the first several Womads set the bar very high. This year with some 400 artists and seven stages in operation the program is both rich, various and variable. Many acts are excellent, some ho-hum, some are clunkers and some exquisite surprises.

First on the program, Irish rhythm and whistle band Flook ! open at Stage Three. A good sized crowd is already stretched out on the grass. Walking through the park from Frome Road we have noted that the vendors' stalls have been moved further north and the food tents have been given more ample space. Stage Four is closer by, but the overall configuration is immediately, reassuringly recognisable. Flook! musicians Sarah Allen and Brian Finnegan are fluting their way through a Sligo Reel , with Ed Boyd on guitar and John Joe Kelly puttering the bodhran. Someone picks up an accordion for the slower paced Gentle Giant, dedicated to a Macedonian musician friend, and the tempo changes again for E-flat Reels. It is low-key and friendly, a nice hors d'oeuvre before the main stage begins.

Following the Kaurna welcome at Stage One, the ASO are back in good-natured strength, this time as backing band to French violinist Gilles Apap. An energetic performer he rolls back the sleeves of his hippie tunic and scrapes his way through some Django Reinhardt followed by Mozart as Mozart, Mozart from the Ozarks and Mozart as gypsy Hungarian. The ASO are good sports, it's hardly a good showcase for their capacities and signals, perhaps, that the orchestra spot at Womad needs more careful thought.

Pato Banton, the Birmingham based musician, leads his Reggae Revolution through a disappointing set - for those hoping for some dinkum reggae, that is. His songs promise Positive Vibrations but the preachiness is more like Sunday School. In their white gear the band looks flash enough but James Renford, lively though he is on saxophone, does not make up for the lacklustre lyrics and stodgy drum and bass. After some turgidly worthy Pato originals, the Bob Marley cover, Jamming, is a pleasing variation, as is the Rascals hit Groovin'. But, despite the crowd's undoubted enthusiasm, I am left thinking that we still haven't seen a reggae act at Womadelaide.

American musician Bob Brozman specialises in National Resonator instruments, art deco beauties from the 1930s, they are the Airstream trailers of the guitar world. He is a brilliant player using strong percussive additions to his bottleneck and lap-style playing. He visits blues, ragtime, Hawaiian slack key, songs from the Bahamas, tunes on custom long neck guitar and custom short neck guitar. He also wields a twelve string Bolivian chirango. Brozman is a hypermanic wizard and when he calls for us to join in with the calypso Uncle Joe only the contrapunters among us dare try.

Saturday begins for me with Jimmy Little, in his burgundy blazer in the mid afternoon heat. Backed by Brendan Gallagher's Karma County Jimmy delivers eight or so selections from the Messenger CD including Cattle and Cane and Ed Kuepper's The Way I Made You Feel. The singer takes a fall during the first song, Under the Milky Way , and we have our concerns for him for a minute there. But he braves the heat, and the shock, to ring a telephone to glory and breathe new life into the Roy Orbison hit Crying.

Malian singer Rokia Traore performs two lovely sets accompanied by her guitar and the distinctive n'goni, banjo-like instruments playing syncopated notes against her sweetly resonant vocal and the harmonies of Xenia Caraibe and Cotinne Thuy Thy. She sings selections from her recent Wanita CD, including Kana Neni , a song of gratitude and Souba, a hymn to community respect. Rokia Traore will be a welcome inclusion in any future Womad event.

The return of Richard Thompson, veteran British songwriter and virtuoso guitarist is similarly auspicious. Playing superbly on both occasions he covers material from the early 70s through to his recent Mock Tudor CD. From the latter comes Bathsheba Smiles and Cooksferry Queen but diehards grow misty-eyed at such gems from the back catalogue as The Great Valero, Vincent and When the Spell is Broken. He even recalls, from Amnesia, Waltzin's For Dreamers and, provides a memorable Stage Three twilight encore with The Dimming of the Day. Thompson's songs are often melancholy, with a sardonic edge - ballads in plain D with a haunting tenor and a brilliantly apt guitar.

Another Saturday night highlight is the Afro Celt Sound System who have developed their 1996 stage performance, full of hesitant concern for the technical intricacies of their live, tape mix sound into an impressively fluid mix of music and dance almost reminiscent of the Prodigy at their raging best. Simon Emmerson is still the MC of the event, setting up beats from his keyboard while various other Celts enter fugue-like into the blend. James McNally adds heavily miked up bodhran along with flute and whistle, Iarla O Lionaird, his long hair cropped this time, delivers his rather self-consciously angelic vocal , Emer Mayock sits at the back of the stage pumping up a storm from her uillean pipes.

Then there's the Afro section - drummers N'Faly Kouyate, Moussa Sissokho and Arivinderpal Kalsi - on a variety of talking, dhol and balafon drums. The band weaves an extended selection from their second CD Release, but it is the signature material from their best-selling debut album which really hits the pedal - Whirl-Y-Reel mixes 1 and 2 - with the rippling, twanging drums, wood flutes and jigging pipes forming an irresistible intercontinental techno ceilidh which has the night crowd bopping nearly as energetically as the onstage dancers.

The inevitable program clashes mean missing Carlos Nunez for Bob Brozman but my glimpse of the Galician bagpiper on the Sunday leaves me unrepentant, especially as Armenian duduk player Djivan Gasparyan is playing an extraordinary set at Stage Four. The eerie, vibrato sounds from this little apricot wood flute are almost indescribable. Accompanied by two other duduks, one regular, one bass, the drone sound is as haunting as it is apparently simple. Gasparyan has played with a range of Western musicians including Womad founder Peter Gabriel . His CD, produced by Nusrat collaborator Michael Brook, is called Moon Shines at Night. Some Womad CD purchases prove not to be durable after the event. This wonderful recording is not one of them.

Other performers of note include the long-standing ambassadors for Cuban music, Sierra Maestra whose second set is particularly fine, John Butler, who, despite some heavy influences from Ben Harper and Eddie Vedder, is nonetheless an exciting talent on twelve string guitar, and the Chemrami Zarb Trio. They play a mesmeric form of Iranian drum which is sufficiently beguiling for me to stay at Stage Seven at midnight when I had fully intended to hear the equally accomplished flute recital from Dr Natesan Ramani.

The cancellation of Nigerian Afrobeat star Femi Kuti is a major disappointment. And despite his valiant arrival, at late notice, Papa Wemba's replacement performance is insufficient consolation. The Paris-based singer is as dapper as ever but the set is haughtily offhand. He has been quoted as saying that he prefers African audiences because they understand what he is singing about. Well, yes. But at Womad there are plenty of translators on hand, especially French speakers, and Papa Wemba could have reached out more than this.

In contrast is Zimbawean singer Oliver Mtukudzi and The Black Spirits whose performance on Sunday night is the essence of Southern African music - expressively grainy vocals, intricate cross rhythms, and nimbly playful guitar sounds. His tuku music, sung in the Shona dialect, covers a range of issues from the value of tradition in Dzoka Uyamwe to the tragedy of the AIDS epidemic in Mabasa, a song he dedicates to his late brother.

As`in previous years, this Womadelaide demonstrates that the event is greater than the sum of its programs. Its broad audience appeal, the parkland ambience and the consistently high production values make it an event which continues to justify its ticket price - just under five dollars an hour is good value in anybody's language. But the program is less even this time and the Femi Kuti cancellation is not only a disappointment but maybe a sign of things to come. There is serious talk of the event becoming an annual one. That sounds terrific, of course, but I wonder if the audience will return as faithfully when it means Adelaide Festival dollars will be fewer and there is, perhaps, less depth in the batting. The organisers have a hard-won reputation to protect here - and what will it profit any of us if Womad were to try to gain more of the world music market only to lose its soul?

"Big World" The Adelaide Review, No.210, March, 2001. pp.34-5.

Adelaide Festival Crisis

Published: 2001-12-01 *Adelaide Festival*

Murray Bramwell

The past two months have been like a spill of dominoes for the Adelaide Festival. From the debacle over the Hitler poster, late in October, to the dismal program launch, days later, which revealed, finally, how empty the larder had become and how many projects had failed - like so many baby turtles on the beach - to reach maturity. To make matters worse, Artistic Director Peter Sellars was unavailable for the launch, neither as support to his beleaguered associates, nor to provide much needed explanation of the ways of god to man. The fact that he had a prior commitment directing an opera in Paris and, in the age of internet, sent a video message which arrived by snail mail two days late, only added vinegar to the situation. The announcement, on November 12, of Peter Sellars' resignation seemed just one more bloody thing - and less of a shock than an inevitability.

So how did this fiasco happen ? How did we all think that someone was steering things when no-one was ? None of us could say there were no warning signs even from the beginning. When Sellars' appointment was announced, let me be clear, I was the first to be enthusiastic. His work in theatre and opera has been extraordinary and his contribution has been considerable. When I chaired his session at the inaugural Festival of Ideas back in 1999 I was very happy to record my admiration for him and when he spoke like a wired up evangelist we were all impressed by his zest and his humanity. I am still impressed by his zest and his humanity.

The trouble is, there are two Peter Sellars. One is the iconoclastic director who directed a version of Aeschylus's The Persians in Washington in the middle of the Gulf War, who has produced a series of radical readings of Mozart operas, who has worked in marvellous collaboration with John Adams and Alice Goodman on Nixon in China and The Death of Klinghoffer and most recently El Nino, and who has continued to astonish audiences at Glyndebourne with productions such as his version of Handel's oratorio, Theodora. That Peter Sellars is an artist of international standing.

The other Peter Sellars is an arts activist with an agenda on community arts which is idealistic and confrontational. It was Sellars who, when appointed Director of the Los Angeles Festival, took the events into the South Central area immediately after the LA riots - or the LA Insurrection as he prefers to call it. It was a bold move to take the arts audience into parts of the city they would normally never venture. It was a strategy to strengthen urban interaction and give prestige to minorities and subcultures such as the African American and Hispanic communities. It was a blithe notion. The LA Festival is no longer operating.

It seems clear, when Sellars was offered the Adelaide job, that no-one asked him whether he planned to recreate the LA Festival. Or, just as likely, that he made no bones about what he was going to do and nobody really listened. You know how people say things and you can't quite believe what you've heard and think you must have been mistaken. Like when Sellars said that the money would all be gone by the time the Festival began, and when he said its success might only be evident ten years from now. He has mentioned plenty of times that he didn't believe in Festival safaris - bagging this big ticket item and that - even though in most people's festivals Sellars himself and his works are just such an item.

He also made it clear, early on, that he planned to appoint associate directors to go out and develop program and raise money. Didn't the people who hired him and the people who manage the infrastructure wonder why a group of relatively inexperienced and mostly young artists and cultural activists were being asked to do what a high profile director ought to be doing. That this was a weird moment to start invoking a collective model and could be seen as a way of amortising both effort and responsibility. But the appointments were made and the long and unhappy process of program planning began.

There seems to be no time when it was made clear to Peter Sellars that there are non-negotiables in a festival - and the Adelaide Festival is no different from any other whether Edinburgh or Avignon or Sydney. That it is not carte blanche at all. There are financial and artistic obligations, there is a history, a continuity of identity. That it is a cultural asset, for God's sake. Surely, communicating this is a job for a board or a general manager or an Arts Minister - or all of those people. It is also the job of commentators. But the charge of artistic interference - and bucketing an event before it has even happened - is the fear of every enlightened community. No one wants to be remembered for booing The Rite of Spring, and so Adelaide erred on the side of caution and politeness.

Peter Sellars said in his resignation statement that he had made his share of mistakes since coming to Adelaide. I wonder what he thought they were ? Among them surely, is that he brought a template with him and didn't look and listen hard enough when he got here. That he - and I am sure he would be appalled to hear me say this - behaved like an imperialist. If he had looked and listened, the way Barrie Kosky, that other boy haircut, did and had he recognised how the place works, how the Festival works, how the Fringe works, Sellars would have realised that a lot of his much-vaunted new approach was not new. Kosky, for instance, had the best free stuff anyone had seen for Red Square.

In two excellent festivals Robyn Archer had brilliantly blended high calibre international work - Les Ballets C de la B, Black on White- with a wide-ranging free program including the fully developed Flamma Flamma and a detailed indigenous section. Archer had Aboriginal country bands playing on the Plaza, Jimmy Little at the Beltana racecourse, she also had Gay Bilson feeding the five thousand at Elder Park. Archer introduced the regional program and set up the Port hub. She commissioned Ochre and Dust and Big hArt works. Her reconciliation program was the most comprehensive incorporation of contemporary indigenous work, as well as young disadvantaged groups. She even had a Shockheaded Peter.

What Robyn Archer didn't do was confuse the Festival with Come Out or the food and wine festival or a local council community program. She didn't think that it was the job of the Festival to become a film producer, even though more direct grants to the film corporation would be a great idea. Nor did she have a fantasy that Adelaide has a plutocrat patron class who would enjoy paying for a private meal and a string quartet for more money than the rest of the city could, or would afford. This is not Manhattan or Salzburg - our wealthy will pay four hundred bucks for the best seats at the Grand Final, or Barbra Streisand, or some other pseudo egalitarian event, but sitting like porkers paying too much for their food is something Australians will do only when the whole world isn't watching.

Who was guiding Peter Sellars in these arcane local ways. What did he actually pitch ? and what was his brief ? He may have said : "cheaper and radical, socially just and inclusive". None of these things has happened. The costs blew out, the ideas were, consciously or unconsciously, a xerox of earlier, less trumpeted, programming, the social justice aspect has seen communities from Burra to outer metropolitan Adelaide brought into projects which were then ditched through lack of budget. The inclusivity has driven a group of inexperienced associates into tasks which were not their forte and, after being hammered for being a drain on the budget (in a move that many would welcome in the corporate sector) they all had to turn in half their salaries to help pay for running costs.The sight of the demoralised associates at the Festival program launch, talking up a handful of surviving events, is one we should long remember. The author of this half-arsed idea nowhere to be seen, artists with no opportunity to put their view, confidentiality agreements everywhere locking things up.

We are now in damage control with the Adelaide Festival and many, including director Sue Nattrass are working hard to bring a revised program together. We are being called upon to support the Festival and of course we will. The combination with the Fringe, the ever flourishing Writers' Week and the scheduling of further events courtesy of Arts Projects Australia will bring a more familiar festival mix into focus. It is an awful irony that El Nino, an example of Sellars at his best, as a hard working imaginative artist, will very likely not be seen. It is also an irony that he didn't want the opera to play here because it was not part of his radical vision.

The Festival has been badly shaken by events of the past year and there needs to be a serious investigation of what has taken place. Demonising Peter Sellars is not the solution. It is not as though he lied to parliament. No-one could say he didn't warn us about his intentions. The associates did not appear in the dead of night. The program plan, or lack of it, was evident more than a year ago. The writing was on the wall, the blood was in the water, the die was cast - you get the point. We didn't need soothsayers, or detectives. We needed management.

The Adelaide Review, No.219, December, 2001. pp.3-5.

Summer Seven

Published: 2002 *Adelaide Festival*

International Performances Previewed by Murray Bramwell

When, not just the wheels, but the doors, panels and mudguards began falling off the Adelaide Festival program it was fortuitous that Arts Projects Australia has been on hand to provide a seven point Plan B. In fact, the varied music and performance events being presented in Adelaide and other centres from late this month through to early March, had already been offered for inclusion in the original Festival line-up and politely declined. Now, in part through the auspices of the 2002 Fringe, we will be getting a much needed injection of quality and the kind of international perspective Adelaide has been lacking over the past year and a half.

It is noteworthy that throughout 2001 almost the only overseas performing arts ensemble we saw in this city was Ballet Rambert, also sponsored by APA. The absence of touring works has its effect on the local industry. Not only does the horizon diminish for the audience but artists also miss out on the kind of imaginative tonic that comes from a vibrant interchange between activity here and the world elsewhere.

Packaged with the slogan - What in the World is Going On, the Arts Projects Australia suite of events begins with a concert in the Entertainment Centre from leading Talking Head, David Byrne. Apart from being the driving force in one of the most influential bands of the new wave in late seventies New York, Byrne has had a whole other career as a composer with his much admired score The Catherine Wheel for Twyla Tharp, as a collaborator with director Robert Wilson and as the slightly weirdy MC for the widely admired Sessions on West 54th Street performance series. Byrne tours here for the first time since 1988 and will perform from his current album Look Into the Eyeball, a lively return to form, impeccably recorded with string arrangements worthy of Van Dyke Parks and some spicy collaborations with Mexican outfit Café Tacuba.

Little more than a week later, The Michael Nyman Band will give one recital only in the Festival Theatre. Celebrated for his film scores for a succession of Peter Greenaway productions, Nyman's compositions are distinctive for their vibrant, almost percussive string arrangements which gather tempo with hypnotic intensity. He will perform with a twelve piece string and brass ensemble and present a program of film works including Wonderland, The End of the Affair, Jane Campion's The Piano and Greenaway classics, The Draughtsman's Contract and Drowning By Numbers.

Also slated for early February is Noche Flamenco, a troupe from Madrid under the artistic direction of Martin Santangelo and featuring his wife Soledad Barrio. The group of twelve flamenco dancers and musicians will perform at Her Majesty's for five nights.

Three Dark Tales, winner of the Total Theatre Award from the 200 Edinburgh Festival, is the work of Theatre O - comprising four performers using mime, gesture, acrobatics and straight acting to present three intertwining narratives of life and intrigue in the contemporary urban office . Dream on Mr Tibble is about a downtrodden husband who gets revenge against his tormentors, The Unfortunate Predicament of Amelia Sas is about a young woman's life with tyrannical parents, while the Frank in Frank's Wardrobe is a manager trying to keep on an even keel at work while his family life disintegrates. Praised for their physical inventiveness, their verbal flair and a touching blend of comedy and pathos, Theatre O's Three Dark Tales promises to put the work ethic under close inspection.

From February 24 the Torrens Parade Ground will host a sixty foot inflatable white dome. Designed by German architect, Hans-Walter Muller, it is home to the sixteen aerialists and musicians of French company, Les Arts Sauts. Literally translated, "the jumping arts," the company aspires to the condition of ballet, taking conventional trapeze into a higher realm, nearly fifty feet above our carefully reclined heads. They have performed before at the Perth and Wellington Festivals, here they are a Fringe headliner. The show is entitled Kayassine, which is Laotian for circus.

Hopeless Games is another instance of the amalgam of dance and theatre. A co-production of the Do-Theatre company from St Petersburg and fabrik Potsdam from Germany it is directed by Do-Theatre founder, Evgeny Kozlov and performed by five actor/dancers. The production is a combination of Absurdist theatre and the kind of dance narrative we associate with innovators such as Pina Bausch.

Set in a deserted European railway station, the performers erupt into a surreal recreation of the playful, yet "hopeless" games of long-departed vagrants and transients. A quiet sensation at the 1999 Edinburgh Fringe, Hopeless Games combines poignant, sometimes menacing, stage imagery with energetic performance, evocative soundscape and video sequences. Do-Theatre has been working at a creative pitch since 1989 and fabrik Potsdam was founded by East German dancers, Sven Till and Wolfgang Hoffmann, only months after the tearing down of the Berlin Wall.

Also part of the Adelaide Fringe program, Hopeless Games can be seen at the Union Hall from 26 February to March 9. As well, on 24 February, watch out for the abseiling antics of French performers Amoros and Augustin in 360 Degrees in the Shade, at a venue yet to be announced.

And, finally, for two performances only at the Adelaide Town Hall on March 2, Jan Garbarek, in concert with the renowned Early Music quartet, the Hilliard Ensemble, presents the hugely successful Officium program. One of the all-time hits for the ECM label, this intriguing combination of counter-tenor and improvised soprano saxophone promises to be as memorable as Garbarek's splendid set at last year's Festival. And, if you already own Officium and played it to death years ago, now is the time to dust it off and discover it all over again. The new Garbarek and Hilliard CD Mnemosyne will be performed at other venues on the tour - many devotees would think it well worth an interstate trip to catch that as well.

The Adelaide Review, No 220, January, 2002. pp.23-4

Fringe Notes

Published: 2002-02-01 *Adelaide Fringe*

Adelaide Fringe 2002 Previewed by Murray Bramwell

The Adelaide Fringe is a remarkable event, for its size, its energy and, especially for the opportunity it offers artists to reach their audiences. That has not been happening with much vigour in Adelaide of late. There has been less activity in the performing arts in the past two years and the link with audiences has often been a tenuous one. For any number of good and terrible reasons, people seem to have had their thoughts elsewhere. And, despite much vaunted prosperity in our community, for many young people, whether students or those just trying to get by, the cost of entertainment, and the sheer diversity of it, makes life particularly hard for emerging talents to get attention.

There is always, too, the problem of the famine or the feast. The contrast, between what we have been able to see in Adelaide in the two years since last Festival and what we have on offer in less than four weeks between this month and the first half of next, is almost laughable. So it is to be hoped, yet again, that the audience is not sliced so thin that artists, particularly those who have come from farther afield, will not get a chance to make a quid or two.

To some extent that is also the caffeine that drives the Fringe - that sense of urgency to identify what's the next new thing. Many, of course, prefer the Fringe to the Festival because it gives them precisely the opposite - the guaranteed experience of familiar acts, those no-risk shows supported by high profile regular names on radio and TV. It was good to hearat the launch, the Fringe's excellent AD, Katrina Sedgwick repeat the suggestion that many of us have made before about the program - to take some long shots, to go for old faves, by all means, but also to give the new piece a chance.

Looking through the Official Guide, which has been astutely distributed and niftily designed - from Luke Scholes' startled (or is it excited ?) fawn logo to the ambitiousness of the FringeTX on-line booking office, the Fringe is looking well-managed, well-sponsored, youthful, sharp and consumer friendly. In a sense, the Bambi figure is ironic this year - rather than the uncertain little newcomer, the people over at the Adelaide Festival must surely be feeling that the Fringe looks more like Godzilla.

It is certainly gathering together a huge program. The press kit reminds us that there are 381 registered events, including 76 in comedy and 102 in theatre. There is also a huge visual arts and film and video program, the schools tour YEP event, regional programs, the ATSI indigenous arts project, special schedules for families and the Fresh Bait initiative for young artists.

So let's have a look at some of the theatre and comedy. The theatre has some popular headliners- Suzannah York's celebration of women in Shakespeare is likely to attract plenty, as is Eve Ensler's The Vagina Monologues - this time it features Amanda Blair, Zoe Carides and Libbi Gorr, the artist formerly known as Elle McFeast. New York performance artist Karen Finley returns for three nights, a must for those who already know her work. She's not exactly new on the block but she'll be a real discovery for many of the young and restless. Theatre O from the UK are presenting the highly rated 3 Dark Tales and fabrik Potsdam and DO-Theatre have the visually startling Hopeless Games.

Among the new and more local is ADT's The Age of Unbeauty, Sue Broadway's vaudeville memoir Eccentric Acts, Filch from Doubletap, physical theatre from Victoria, Lucy Dann's The Heart of the Journey, Kooemba Jdarra Indigenous Performing Arts' Yarnin' Up and Junction Theatre's Love Land and Money, directed by Geoff Crowhurst. Vitalstatistix and Savage Wit present Partly It's About Love, Partly It's About Massacre, a return of the collaboration of writer Fiona Sprott and performer Jacqueline Linke who took out awards at Edinburgh with that other long title Often I Find That I am Naked.

Adelaide playwright Stephen House presents a new work Walk in Dirt, Peter Goers has a one man show because Somebody Has to Be, Tangent productions version of Marlowe's Edward II is sharing the Queens Theatre with Fresh Track's The Return written by Reg Cribb and directed by Geordie Brookman. Budgie Lung introduces the work of local writer Joshua Tyler with Swallow Me, a hermit in the 21st century. Theatre Guild's Late Night Shopping, monologues from new writers, is also well worth checking out.

Some successful and welcome returns include Brink Productions' Killer Joe which was one of the livelies of State Theatre's season last year and local professional group Bluetongue whose production of Wit at Theatre 62 gives us an excellent opportunity to see Margaret Edson's brilliant, literate work. Other theatre that looks enticing includes Seattle company, Theatre Simple's return with 52 Pick Up and Strindberg in Paris, and in mid-March, two works at the Festival Centre - at the Playhouse, Leitmotiv from Canada's Les Deux Mondes Theatre Company and cult performer Bette Bourne as the almost-inimitable Quentin Crisp in Resident Alien at the Space.

The Comedy program is huge. Seventy six acts, including such usual suspects as Scared Little Weird Guys, Judith Lucy, Lano and Woodley, Rachel Berger, Merrick and Rosso and Wil Anderson. There is the Cream of the Irish and the Best of the Fest . I am always ready for more from Rich Hall - even as Otis Lee Crenshaw once again. Rod Quantock will deliver on Scum Nation, Ross Noble is returning as is the sparky Arj Barker. And, for those who really want to go all the way to Royston Vasey, there is one show only from Roy Chubby Brown.

There will be tents galore this Fringe. The Amazing Lunar Tent will be hosting a range of circus and cabaret shows including Acrobat, The Happy Sideshow, Taboo, Shenzo's Electric Stunt Orchestra, Aerialize and more big top acts. The sixty foot inflatable white dome at the Torrens Parade Ground will feature outstanding French aerialists Les Arts Sauts for a limited season. And the Famous Spiegeltent, (we saw it first folks and now Melbourne has finally discovered it) returns with performances from Paul Kelly, David Bridie, Joe Camilleri, Jimmy Little, Matt Walker, Vika and Linda, Andrea rienets, Dave Graney, John Butler, Augie March and the Proclaimers among several dozen notable others.

This Fringe, with its Hub at Adelaide Uni in the Union Building and its range of stuff across two hundred and eight venues is full of beans. Some of it will be brilliant, some of it amazing crap. Part of the buzz is to get in and sample. Go to see the things your friends are doing, and venture among strangers, these February and March days and nights in Adelaide- Festival, Fringe, whatever- should make the city buzz again.

The Adelaide Review, No. 221, February, 2002. p.26.

APA

Published: 2002-02-01 *Adelaide Fringe*

APA presents

3 Dark Tales A Theatre O production

Melbourne - Merlyn Theatre February 11 to 20, 2002 Box Office 03 9685 5111

Adelaide Fringe Festival Adelaide - Scott Theatre February 22 to March 9, 2002

Bass 131 246 www.bass.sa.net.au or FringeTIX www.adelaidefringe.com.au

The Company Director Joseph Alford Designer Isla Shaw Choreographer Eva Vilamitjana Lighting design Sarah Coxon

Stories by Joseph Alford, Jon Rand, Carolina Valdes Lucien MacDougall and Sarah Coxon

“O,o interj. An exclamation expressing surprise, admiration, pain, longing, joy etc…”

Formed by Joseph Alford in 1997, Theatre O is a collective of actors, writers, musicians, designers and artists from England, Scotland, Spain and Australia. They have toured in both the UK and internationally. This is their first visit to Australia.

All of the actors have trained at the celebrated Ecole Jacques Lecoq in Paris and bring the distinctive signatures of his physical theatre techniques to performance work of their own devising.

3 Dark Tales premiered at the Edinburgh Fringe in 2000 and won the coveted Total Theatre festival award. From there the company took the show for highly successful seasons in New York and the Barbican Theatre in London. In 2001 Theatre O also received the Stage Acting Excellence Ensemble Award on their return to Edinburgh.

3 Dark Tales weaves three lives into one. Each of the characters works in the same office and has yearnings for something better and beyond . In Dream on Mr Tibble, our anti-hero is a downtrodden office worker with a monstrous wife - but the tables are about to be turned. The predicament in The Unfortunate Predicament of Amelia Sas is that her entire life is controlled by overbearing parents. The third story, Frank’s Wardrobe, is about the office boss, trapped and trying to cope with the fact that his family has left him.

Each is struggling against the things that grind us down and wear us out on a daily basis, striving to find a way to break free, by whatever means.

Ferociously funny and touchingly tragic, 3 Dark Tales reveals the humanity in all of us with its happy, and not-so-happy, ever after.

The Performers

Joseph Alford (England)

Joseph is founder and artistic director of Theatre O (formerly Generally Better Productions). He trained with Jacques Lecoq in Paris. He has performed extensively with Scapegoat Theatre Company, Rotozazza in France and in association with Jonathan Kent at the Almeida Theatre. He is also co-founder of the group Tohu Bohu which performs in conjunction with Theatre O.

Sarah Coxon (Australia)

Sarah read English and History at the University of Western Australia before training for two years with Jacques Lecoq in Paris, including at the Laboratoire d’Etudes de Mouvement (LEM). Her theatre design credits include Two Faced and Lone Star at the Bridewell Theatre. Sarah is also a founding member of Stampede Theatre Company.

Lucien MacDougall (Scotland)

Lucien trained with Jacques Lecoq in Paris and at the Guildford School of Acting. He has performed extensively in England and France, and played in Bond with theatre O at the 1999 Edinburgh Festival. He is co-artistic director of Stampede Theatre.

Carolina Valdes (Spain)

Carolina studied at the Collegi de Teatre de Barcelona and with Jacques Lecoq in Paris. She has also studied dance with both Pilar Dominguez and Jose de la Vega in Spain. She has performed throughout England with Company Paradiso and this is her fourth collaboration with Theatre O.

What the reviews say about Theatre O :

“3 Dark Tales packs more visual inventiveness, hilarity and energy into ninety minutes than seems humanly possible. Manoeuvring between a wardrobe and two clothes-racks, the cast summon three interlinked but idiosyncratically detailed slices of unfulfilled life… “ (Time Out)

“Mime - the spectrally convincing Buster Keaton kind - is an important element of 3 Dark Tales which also borrow heavily from dance, music, farce and more traditional dramatic forms to create a scattershot mixture…

Even though the emotional core is bleak, the four-strong cast still manage to squeeze a lot of slapstick humour out of the raw material. The tales may be of fear and death, but the mood is grotesquely celebratory…while the heart of the piece is basically pointing out that modern life is rubbish, Theatre O can take the source material and alchemise it into something beautiful.” (Sunday Herald)

“Five big stars for 3 Dark Tales…this company uses dance, music and text like no-one else, to create a unique theatrical experience that leaves a lasting impression.. not a syllable or inch of movement is wasted and every second of the ninety minute show counts.” (The List)

“Staged by a young, ridiculously agile company it reminds you why some people have a devout faith in theatre which relies on images rather than words….A sensory treat from start to finish.’ (The Daily Telegraph)

Program notes, February 2002. Commissioned by APA.

Festival Update

Published: 2002-02-01 *Adelaide Festival*

2002 Adelaide Festival Previewed by Murray Bramwell

The call came late on Friday afternoon for the briefing at noon on Sunday 6 January. The much-awaited revamp of the Adelaide Festival program had finally taken place, less than two months from the Opening Ceremony. It is a sunny day outside but our tiny media contingent of not more than a dozen people is led, in somewhat clandestine fashion, through the dressing room catacombs to the stage of the Playhouse which has been blacked and draped in heavy curtains. With the just-printed - and not-yet-to-be-perused ! - orange Festival programs set out before us, we are seated formally at tables arranged in a square under lights. This is for the benefit of the TV camera people, I realise, but it is a sombre setting and if I weren't afraid of courting ill-luck in a theatre, I might have asked whether this was, in fact, the set for the Scottish play, and if a spiky-haired and beaded Californian Banquo was likely to appear, dagger-like, before us ?

The greeting from the organisers is most cordial, of course, but energies are low. The presentation is brisk and there is a sense of keeping to time, although, frankly, there is not a lot to get through. This is not like the Robyn Archer marathon at Charlicks or the Kosky hype from the Hills hoists.

No sooner has Artistic Director, Sue Nattrass got things moving and she is handballing the presentation to Karl Telfer, one of five Associate Directors present - of the ten listed in the Program's staff list. It is his task, with his sister Waiata, to take us through the Kaurna Palti Meyunna, the Opening Ceremony featuring Indigenous people from around Australia and South Australia, as well as representatives from Aotearoa New Zealand, the Zulu Nation of South Africa, Gyuto Monks from Tibet and the Zuni people from New Mexico. It sounds like it will be a majestic event, proceeding from the four outlying squares into Tandanyungga (Victoria Square) for a Spirit Fire ceremony and a dreaming named for an esteemed Kaurna ancestor, Tjilbruke.

Other events, collectively entitled Home/Lands follow over eight more nights, each with a theme such as Holding Your Ground, Carrying Country, Inheritance, Cross Connections and Resilience. Reminiscence, it turns out, is a free outdoor screening of Storm Boy, Heaven is Here is the ASO under the stars with the Adelaide Chamber Singers and the Philharmonia Chorus performing, under the baton of Richard Mills, a new work, Star Chant by Ross Edwards. Take Me Home is a closing concert of country music which is scarily short on line-up details - so far listed are Seaman Dan from the Torres Strait, the Drowners from Mt Barker and Todd Williams from outback NSW. Country fans may need more blandishments than this.

Sue Nattrass passes the task to other Associates - Amanada McDonald Crowley discusses media and digital arts initiatives such as UK unit, Mongrel who have been working with Aboriginal schools in SA. The program of new films, Shedding Light which includes Rolf de Heer's The Tracker, Tony Ayres' Walking on Water and the now-titled Australian Rules, based on Phillip Gwynne's novel Deadly, Unna ? is also outlined. Lynette Wallworth, another Associate, introduces Intertwine, the program of weaving exhibitions and workshops and Gay Bilson discusses Nourish, her innovative Queen Elizabeth Hospital program, as well as The Edible Library, a presentation by Spanish culinary librarian Alicia Rios.

It is abundantly clear that, in Sue Nattrass's words, the vision for the 2002 Festival was started by Peter Sellars and was being carried through by the Associates. The fundamentals remain - a program strongly focused on notions of indigenous and geographical identity, one that celebrates the local against the international, and privileges the broad community as opposed to culturally specialist minorities. It is still the Sellars concept but there is no Sellars to provide the narrative, the spiel, the dazzling effervescence which will not only glue all this string and balsa together but actually make it fly. The Associates have been left an unenviable task and deserve as much support and reassurance as possible.

Ms Nattrass presents herself graciously - but at arm's length. She carries the title of Artistic Director but her demeanour is more like that of an appointed administrator for a grounded airline. She announces additions to the program - eighteen more events than previously. The first is the confirmation of El Nino with film direction by Peter Sellars. It is unclear how much opera, and how much oratorio we will get for a price not much less than Writing to Vermeer. I hope it doesn't turn out to be El Nino- the karaoke Director's Cut. As for Sellars' likely return - Sue Nattrass says Peter is hopeful. We won't hold our breath on that one.

Much of the newly announced repertoire is singular. Literally. Solo shows abound. It may not be the sound of one hand clapping but it is mostly one hand performing. Brenda Wong Aoki unravels cross cultural San Franciscan ancestry in Uncle Gunjiro's Girlfriend, BJ Ward does Stand-up Opera, Patrick Dickson channels David Hare in Via Dolorosa and, scripted by the talented Guy Rundle, Max Gillies channels just about everybody in his sit down banquet of impersonation and impertinence.

In dance, Ros Warby performs Solos, in Delirium, Helen Herbertson is joined by collaborator Trevor Patrick. And the new big ticket item - New York legend, Barbara Cook's Mostly Sondheim, with accompanist Wally Harper, plays two shows in the Festival Theatre. It is big on appeal but the asking price is a reminder of the currency woes for festival programmers shopping in the northern hemisphere.

Looking at the line-up it is disconcertingly ironic to see one show called Skin and another Bone. In fact, though, while it is still must be said this Adelaide Festival is disappointing in scale and conceptual quality that does not mean there will not be many marvellous and unexpected experiences. I am looking forward to the Home/Lands events - although the limited ten day span means that the additional nightly listings are now in competition with those already scheduled. Train Dancing from Red Dust Theatre in Alice Springs promises raw new work, Black Swan's The Career Highlights of Mamu brings together the considerable talents of Scott Rankin, Trevor Jamieson, Andrew Ross and others and MAU Dance's Bone Flute directed by Lemi Ponifasio comes highly recommended and will, with other contributions from Aotearoa New Zealand, enrich trans-Tasman connections at a significant time for both countries.

Other treasures include the return of the gifted photographer and master of understatement, William Yang, and Brian Lipsons's account of Victorian eccentric Francis Galton , A Large Attendance in the Antechamber. US hiphop exponents Chosen will pick up threads in the Cross-Connections program and for those who like to go where the wild roses grow, Nick Cave, Blixa and the other bad seeds will play two nights at Thebarton.

Adelaide artists will benefit from a profusion of residencies, community programs are sprouting around town and especially at the Parks, there are a heap of free exhibitions including the those of the work of Gordon Bennett on 9-11 and the exquisite painting of Ian Abdulla, and I haven't yet mentioned Writers Week, with the likes of Jim Crace, Patricia Grace, Swedish crime writer Henning Mankell, Michael Ondaatje, Jane Urquhart and many more.

I have had plenty to say about the prospects for this festival but it doesn't mean I don't value its objectives or that I don't have great hopes for its success. It is thirty years to the month since I first came to Adelaide and those balmy March nights are among my first impressions on arrival. I remember the 1972 Festival when Allen Ginsberg and Lawrence Ferlinghetti shared their fee with a group of Indulkana songmen in the Town Hall and Scott Hicks was there tape-recording the entire proceedings. The whole city, it seemed, was given over to festivity, and peaceful, tolerant and inquisitive community. That, for me, then and now, was at the very centre of what Don Dunstan and others had imagined for South Australians. Not just some of us, but all of us.

The Adelaide Review, No.221, February, 2002. p.25

Adelaide Theatre

Published: 2002-02-16 *Adelaide Fringe · Comedy*

15 February, 2002. Murray Bramwell

Partly It's About Love...Partly It's About Massacre by Fiona Sprott. Savage Wit and Vitalstatistix. The Bakehouse, Adelaide. Until 16 March. Tickets $18, $12 . Bookings FringeTIX (08) 8201 4567

Jezebel is back, not so much with a vengeance - although first-degree butter knife wounds are involved here - but with a story to tell about her heart, her hormones and the deep ambivalence of commitment. Jezebel is the creation of writer Fiona Sprott and actor Jacqueline Linke, these days known as Savage Wit, who took Often I Find When I am Naked, the first instalment of their continuing chronicle of a single thirty-something, to the Edinburgh Fringe, New York and London's West End. That was back around1999 when Jacqueline Linke picked up Best Actress Award at the Fringe and the show captured broken and twisted hearts wherever it played.

Partly its About Love is an even stronger text than its predecessor. There are still the clear connections to the fast one-liners of such spritzy comedies of neurotic urban interface as Seinfeld and Sex in the City, but here Sprott is confident in more than getting the laughs. Jezebel has become a more ferocious and complicated character than when she was so often naked. Now the desperation cuts deeper, the mood swings are more painful. There is plenty about love, but massacre might just tear it apart.

It is Jezebel's wedding and she, like the whole of the Bakehouse stage, is in scarlet. She is also carrying the blood-stained shirt of her betrothed Park Ranger, she can only rarely bring herself to call him by his name. It all started over the butter, about his constantly leaving the lid off... and the toast crumbs, and the worm farm. Why would he do that ? He isn't pressing charges, she tells us, which is nice.

Jacqueline Linke's Jezebel is splendidly poised between brittle comedy and the kind of anguished hyper-selfconsciousness that afflicts not just the young and the restless. Sprott's text is a dark meditation, especially on Valentine's Day, on the tyrannies of romance, the conspicuous consummation of the bourgeois wedding and the fragility of the everyday self. Linke is carried on the wings of a text, always strong, at times brilliant, Fiona Sprott now has an ear for dialogue as strong as her nose for the zeitgeist.

Vitalstatistix have taken their charter to promote new work for women playwrights into a new heartland. And they have added production values - from Khristina Totos' steadying direction and Ian Moorhead's deft on-stage keyboard soundscape to Sue Grey Gardner's sumptuously simple lighting. Regan Hay's smartly animated text projections also demonstrate that multimedia can contribute something more than just well-meaning powerpoint.

Partly It's About Love... is undoubtedly a hit of a 2002 Adelaide Fringe that has not yet begun. But, if Jezebel will pardon my French, she has the legs to take this comedy of neo-manners anywhere she wants it to go.

The Australian, February 16, 2002.

Fringe Events

Published: 2002-03-01 *Adelaide Fringe*

Reviewed by Murray Bramwell

The Fringe is in full swing for 2002. Even before the Friday night Opening Parade, which attracts a crowd upwards of fifty thousand, plenty of venues are well under way. At The Garden of Unearthly Delights in Rundle Park East, the Amazing Lunar Tent has already opened for circus biz while the Spiegeltent, which made its first appearance in Australia in Adelaide several Fringes ago, has again opened its elegant Edwardian doors for a full tilt menu which continues until the last knock on March 17.

As thousands pack the streets around Rundle Street and Frome Road for the parade, there is a sense that the Fringe is having a particularly good run. Uncertainties around the Festival have probably helped, of course, and the fact that there has not been a lot to cheer about over the past six months. But under Katrina Sedgwick's direction, this year's Fringe has a more than usual zest to it. Certainly the all-comers procession mirrors the youthful energy that is the Fringe at its best.

With a dress code of bubblewrap, alfoil and plastic, you could say transparency is the keynote for the parade. Gigantic apparitions from land and sea, many with illuminated eyes and innards delight the crowd lining the route. Spiders, seahorses, dolphins, even a huge mother figure for the Parks Health Service, are chaotically interspersed with spruiking artists, pitching their shows and craning for maximum exposure. Oxfam is represented, as is Greenpeace and there is warm applause for Amnesty International. It is a broad old church at the Fringe, there is even a protest against one of the major sponsors.

The Fringe has set itself up in various places over the years - in the olden days it was the Lion factory precinct, then various Rundle Street car parks were the go. Now Adelaide University is a major host - with the Union building and adjacent Cloisters set up with a`caravanserai of food and drink vendors. You can get excellent coffee, a wide range of proteins and lounge about on the lawn like everybody else.

The Fringe festival program is vast - they are saying 381 registered events across 208 venues - and the competition for audiences is murderous, as usual. The riches - and undoubtedly a fair number of disappointments - are spread across circus, film, visual arts, cabaret, comedy and theatre, and the international brigade is strong again this time. But, as always, there is also the pleasure of just strolling around the inner city or sitting at a sidewalk table watching the action. We've been having some balmy nights at long last, and the city hasn't looked this perky since... well, the last Fringe and Festival.

One show which has been up and doing earlier than most is the co-production between Savage Wit and Vitalstatistix National Women's Theatre, Partly It's About Love...Partly It's About Massacre. Written by Fiona Sprott and featuring Jacqueline Linke, it continues the exploits of Jezebel, the mood-swinging single first introduced in Often I Find That I am Naked, which premiered at the 1998 Adelaide Festival and went on to seasons in London New York and awards at the Edinburgh Festival.

This time Jezebel is working the butterknife-edge of commitment and homicide. Her lover, Matthew, mostly referred to as her Park Ranger, is a very suitable prospect except when it comes to sharing space, pegging wet washing, toast crumbs and, his mother. The nuptials are upset when push comes to lunge and the Betrothed is hospitalised with first degree wounds from the kitchen cutlery. He's not pressing charges, muses Jezebel, which is nice. Linke's performance is even more assured than in Naked and Sprott's text has, this time, jumped the fence from hip urban TV sitcom to a zone of ambivalence which is not only blackly comic but disturbingly truthful to the anxieties of the self in everyday combat.

Director Khristina Totos and a talented team including composer Ian Moorhead, multimedia designer Regan Hay and lighting designer Sue Grey-Gardiner, has provided production values which are not only enough to take Jezebel well above the ruck at the Fringe, but, no doubt, to tour again to Edinburgh and beyond.

First in at the Spiegeltent is UK comic Bill Bailey who has also just turned up as a sidekick in a new Channel 2 comedy called Black Books. Bailey is a funny fellow, even though, as he reminds us, he doesn't do jokes. We never quite get to hear what happened to the three blokes who went into a pub, but we do get to think about the theological inconsistencies of insurance policies and the deeper philosophical implications of Uncertainty.

He has a bluff West Country manner and a nice line in dry irony. He can also find his way around guitar and keyboards, treating us to some some lethal parodies of Billy Bragg and Chris de Burgh and, until the hard disk went wobbly, some loopy samples of George Dubya on terrorism. In a Fringe where the usual suspects are particularly usual, Bill Bailey is one in a fresh line of sad bastards.

The Heart of the Journey, at the Hub Cinema, with a commendation for the United Nations Media Peace Awards promised much. This collaboration between Lucy Dann, an Aboriginal woman from Broome and Mayu Kanamori, a photo documentarist, charts Lucy's search for her Japanese father, a pearl diver who lived briefly in Australia before moving back to a small fishing town in Japan. It is a fascinating story of bi-cultural identity and Lucy Dann is an appealing and courageous woman. But we rarely get to the Heart of this Journey. There is little to place the story in its larger social context, and a great deal of New Age-y music and artful snaps of airports, sunsets and sharp focus fishing ropes. It is a reminder that the line between the resonantly particular and the obscurely personal can be very fine.

At Tandanya, Junction Theatre is premiering a work by Adelaide based writer Jared Thomas. Love Land and Money is ambitious in its reach. It traces the parallel lives of Bunda and his cousin Jack. Bunda (Michael Harris)has trained as a lawyer to negotiate land rights for the forthcoming Darwin railway. Jack (Jodus Madrid) living with Suzie (Jacqueline Cook), a white Australian, works for the railways, trying to make his own way without using his Aboriginality as identity or for gain in employment, as indicated in his relationship with the cheerful racist, Bill (Patrick Frost). Bunda's partner Warrika (Rose Turner) is a social worker, taken for granted while the larger demands of his work prevail. Narrating their stories is Wilka, the dingo spirit played with comic gusto by Robert Wuldi.

As the title suggests Jared Thomas explores the conflicts between the personal and the communal, between the pressures of work and life within family. Bunda's mission is laced with egotism, something not lost on Warrika. Jack's individualist approach is indicative of the times, but with it comes alienation.

Director Geoff Crowhurst, with designer Kathryn Sproul, has used simple staging - a circle of red earth with brightly coloured painted hangings depicting, Wilka tells us, the ancient trade routes of the desert peoples. The excellent music, for electric and acoustic guitar, is played live by composer Grayson Rotumah. Love Land and Money has a likeable currency in its themes and its concern with such issues as uranium mining and nuclear waste dumps. There is a confidence in Thomas's work that is fresh and insightful. The performances are variable but engaging nonetheless, and Robert Wuldi again reminds us what a strong stage actor he has become.

Another work which examines the relationship of the individual to culture is Jamaican American, Michael Phillip Edwards' Runt, a monodrama about his relationship with his father. It is brave work which confronts the depth of his hatred for his father's influence - " I choose against you" he repeatedly asserts. A self made man who left Jamaica to earn his fortune in the United States, Edwards Senior, as described by his son, is a man of implacable will and in his way, a man of honour. He is also a charismatic womaniser, a bully, and in fear of the runt weakness he detects in his own son. For his part Thomas has his father's obstinacy. He goads and defies his father, secure in the fact that he is loved by him, however brutally.

Actor Wilson Bell gives a most accomplished rendering of the father/ son relationship, capturing both the ferocity and the tenderness of a bond which is tempered by the drive, first to rise above poverty, and then to succeed as a black American in the land of apparently infinite opportunity. Runt is an excellent piece of writing and Wilson Bell's performance has made it one of the highpoints of the Fringe so far.

The Adelaide Review, No.222, March, 2002. pp.22-23.

Three arts projects

Published: 2002-03-01 *Adelaide Fringe · Theatre*

Three Arts Projects

3 Dark Tales Theatre O Scott Theatre

Kayassine Les Arts Sauts Torrens Parade Ground

Hopeless Games fabrik Potsdam & DO Theatre Union Hall

Reviewed by Murray Bramwell

Theatre O from the UK is a hypermobile company which uses the signature performance techniques of Ecole Jacques Lecoq in Paris. Their Edinburgh Festival hit, 3 Dark Tales is one of three international productions being offered in the Adelaide Fringe program by Arts Projects Australia.

Using two heavy costume racks, a wardrobe which passes as an elevator, a lobby, a bedroom and, a wardrobe, plus a range of office chairs and a large assortment of hanging lampshades, Theatre O caper their way through their tales of mystery and imagination.

Mr Tibble, played by Theatre O founder Joseph Alford, is a downtrodden little fellow who is pushed around at the office, and, at home, even more pushed about by his overbearing wife (Catherine Valdes) who glowers at him and berates him in a gobbledy language which is a mix of franglais, spanglish and key words like jaguar and Dr Sav-aage - a reference to their sports car driving neighbour with whom she is having ferocious hanky panky. The meek-mannered Tibble, of course, can only take so much of all this and, with the introduction of a very large and terribly sharp imaginary kitchen knife, the dark tale gesticulates somewhat obviously to its dark conclusion.

The Unfortunate Predicament of Amelia Sas (Sarah Coxon) focuses on a young woman across the office from Tibble who has parents from one of the outer rings of Hell. They incessantly talk over and through her and are obsessed with having her married off. They are so self-preoccupied they even fail to notice that she is trying to tell them that she has only half an hour to live. Fortunately Tibble arrives to serenade her in her final minutes, in a scene that makes a fine exercise in slo- mo but seems to go on for the infinity that Amelia is headed towards. The third tale centres on the office boss, Frank, played by Lucien MacDougall with a Rowan Atkinson mandible and an arching eyebrow to match. Frank's secret is that his family have given him the flick and he goes through the excruciation of loneliness and rejection.

3 Dark Tales has been praised for its knockabout pace and skilful physicality but the routines are all-too familiar despite their technique, and the endless barrage of mime and voiced sound effects every time a door opens or a seat belt is clicked shut, wears decidedly thin. The stories are unremarkable and surprisingly heartless re-tellings of themes of office drudgery and modern loneliness. Chaplin and Keaton covered this ground well before now and while there is always more to say, Theatre O, for all their confident virtuosity, have not managed to get much beyond cliche.

The first thing to say about Les Arts Sauts is what an extraordinary dome they have. Forty one metres wide, the inflatable white bubble in which they perform has been especially designed by German architect Hans-Walter Muller. Inside its black walls are three arched beams which support the vast rig on which the fourteen aerialists perform. The audience faces upwards, reclining in deck chair-like seats reportedly based on designs of those in the Somerville Auditorium in Perth which the company visited back in 1995.

The show is called Kayassine, Laotian for circus - although Les Arts Sauts have moved a long way from traditional circus conventions. Their trapeze work is not performed to rolling drums and the antics of red-nosed clowns, nor to the elaborately meaningless solemnities that are now the hallmark of Cirque du Soleil. Les Arts Sauts, you could say have risen well above the competition .

A group of musicians- two cellists and a bass player along with two female vocalists with gymnastic voices provide a continuing, soundtrack to the dizzying aerial work. Dressed in scarlet, the singers warble, scat and generally improvise while the bass and cellos set up heavy bowed rhythms. A single female figure begins a series of ever more alarming rotations from a solitary and very high swing, another performs inside a single loop of white fabric. The lighting is sparse and the dome has an murky enormity.

Then, with what sounds like the most unearthly graunching, the entire stage rig is raised more than fifty feet in the air, taking with it all the musicians who continue performing unfazed at being taken, without apparent warning, to nosebleed altitudes.

The aerial display from our horizontal vantage point is as technically precise as it is unnerving. These trapeze routines are anything but. The flips, turns, catches and reversals become increasingly complex and demanding. There are some comic moments high up on the cross-bar but the sense is one of pure flight, propelled by daring and an almost dancerly sense of movement. Director Herve Lelardoux and Les Arts Sauts have taken the thrills of the trapeze swing and placed them into a theatrical canopy that is lighter than air. It is an extraordinary experience.

DO-Theatre from St Petersburg and fabrik from Potsdam, companies formed in the wake of the collapse of the Berlin Wall, have recently joined forces to create dance theatre such as their current touring work, Hopeless Games. Drawing from Russian clowning styles, acro-batics, dance and mime, fabrik dancers Sven Till and Wolfgang Hoffman ,DO director Evgeny Kozlov, his wife Irina Kozlova and dancer Alexander Bondarev have created a blackly comic glimpse of the ghosts of European history.

A group of transients take over a derelict railway station for a bit of mucking about. Trains pass through but do not stop. The tramps in bowler hats and long coats pass the time with hopeless, perhaps we should say, futile games. Someone takes out a revolver and a macabrely pleasurable game of Russian roulette follows. Restlessly they pick up battered suitcases and stride about, clashing and colliding, ganging up on each other, fooling and menacing each other.

There are many influences from butoh, from silent comedy, white mime and most notably the Absurd theatre of Samuel Beckett. The text here is Waiting for Godot - not so much the Godot, as the waiting. The boredom and the random violence is also mixed with lyrical and contemplative moments as the music shifts from cracked pianos, kazoos and strained violins to waltzing accordions and celebratory folk styles.

Hopeless Games is a reminder of the misery and anonymous fates of so many Europeans displaced by the turbulence of the 20th century. Crimes and kindnesses go unremarked and the engines of political change roll through regardless. This zany little tableau of energy and sorrow, for all the now familiar commonplaces of its style - the hats and coats and cases of Pina Bausch, the Magritte balloons, the wonky music denoting chaos and discord, the stage fog and endless trains - has a tangible melancholy and weariness which is affecting and provoking. It is theatre of the old world reflecting a new, but not different, order. And, on a warm Adelaide evening, it is a useful reminder that there really are other experiences and destinies beyond our own.

"Three arts projects" The Adelaide Review, No. 222, March, 2002, p.22.

Adelaide Festival 2002 Theatre

Published: 2002-03-04 *Adelaide Festival*

3 March, 2002 Murray Bramwell

The Career Highlights of Mamu by Trevor Jamieson and Scott Rankin. Black Swan Theatre Company. The Playhouse. Adelaide Festival Centre. Until 5 March. Tickets $ 48, $32 SPU. BASS 13 246.

Co-written and narrated by Aboriginal performer Trevor Jamieson, The Career Highlights of Mamu is an epic work, because much has happened to his kinship family from the spinifex country of Tjuntjuntjara, just over the border between South and Western Australia. Mamu, the spirit demon has not only caused much havoc over a very long time but more recently the Spinifex people have been caught up in one of the true terrors of the 20th century. Part of their homeland is a stretch of country - deemed uninhabited by the British and Australian authorities - known as Maralinga.

Mamu begins with personal history. Jamieson, who grew up in Cundeelee Mission in WA before moving 2000 kms south to Kalgoorlie, calls upon a group of family members and elders to reconstruct a story of the courage and determination of his people. Introducing himself by name, the actor narrates a living documentary accompanied by multi-media screens and onstage music. “It was an idea for a one man show, and then this mob took over “ he laughs as he welcomes elders including Dinny Smith, Roy Underwood, Fred Grant and Stella Wicker, brothers Jarman and Milton Hansen, musician Steve Richter, composer Iain Grandage and Japanese performer Asako Izawa.

Dressed in black t-shirt and trackies, Jamieson describes the importance of kinship and the lore relating to birthplace, then talks about his family. In the spirit of Black Swan’s other innovative work, Bran Nue Dae, in which Jamieson himself had a lead role, the wedding of his parents is re-enacted as the cast members enthusiastically gather around. There are always Mamu presences looming however, which bring a grimness to the story.

There are songs, written and sung by Jamieson and Milton Hansen, and comic scenes of the first sighting of a steam train in the desert and bush mechanic car repairs which end with a Chuck Jones boom - much to the delight of the first night audience, including the many Aboriginal people attending. The Emu dance is performed, never seen outside the Tjuntjuntjarra community before.The generosity of the elders in sharing such ceremonies with us has a profound effect.

The central stories relate to Hiroshima and Maralinga. Jamieson is filmed in Hiroshima talking with a survivor describing his experiences as a nine year old. .Asako Izawa, in traditional kimono, recites accounts while graphic images of the bomb blast and its horrific casualties are screened. Then the Maralinga tests are described - first from upbeat Movietone news footage and official British assertions about the “emptiness” of the area. It is powerfully ironic to hear elders describe, some on film and some first hand, the experience of being summarily moved on, and the ordeals and loss of life in trying to return to the contaminated homelands.

This production is brimming with material and the participants create a memorable living history with candour and great dignity. Black Swan collaborators - director Andrew Ross, designer Genevieve Dugard, Debbie Gittins’ film work, Iain Grandage ‘s music - have contributed much and Trevor Jamieson has imagined a terrific project. It is astutely anti-theatrical and a marvellous story which tells itself - almost. As lead, Jamieson still needs to provide more narrative focus and fluency before this show is the breakthrough it promises to be.

“Devilish toll of nuclear testing” The Australian, March 4, 2002. p.15.

Adelaide Festival - Film

Published: 2002-03-08 *Adelaide Festival*

6 March 2002 Murray Bramwell

Shedding Light . Australian films commissioned by Adelaide Festival and SBS Independent. Her Majesty's Theatre, Adelaide. Until 7 March. Regional South Australian tour until 14 March Contact Country Arts SA (08) 8444 0400 for details.

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The Adelaide Festival films have always been one of Peter Sellars' pet ideas, and they have turned out to be among his best. With various funding, including $1.5m from the Festival, Shedding Light Director and SBS Independent executive, Bridget Ikin produced four features which premiered this week. Three of the four have Indigenous perspectives focusing on Truth and Reconciliation - as does the fifth in the series, Beneath Clouds, not a commission, but a debut feature by Ivan Sen, also shown for the first time.

Before the season began there was concern that the films would sit uneasily with the rest of the program, adrift from the live performance menu. The reverse has been the case. Because the Indigenous themes of the Festival have been so ubiquitous, events interact in chain reactions.

Whether visiting Ian Abdulla's evocative paintings at Flinders University's Grote Street Gallery, seeing The Tracker a hundred metres further down at Her Majesty's Theatre, or walking back to the square at night in time to see women from the Anangu Pitjantjatjara lands dancing beside the statue of Queen Victoria, the experiences reverberate. But they also need grounding, something which the strong discourses in the films provide.

Rolf de Heer said of The Tracker that he made the film with the context of a Festival premiere in mind. So having Graham Tardiff's elegiac music sung live by Archie Roach adds an almost operatic dimension to the screening. Set in 1922 The Tracker is very like a western, except that the bloke with the hat and the rifle is not the hero and no-one has a name, only a function. Looking like William Holden and sounding like John Meillon, Gary Sweet plays the Fanatic, tyrannising the Tracker (David Gulpilil in yet another outstanding performance) in pursuit of the Fugitive (Noel Wilton) also an Aboriginal. Rolf de Heer's film is a kind of mythic reversal of history when the Tracker exacts some invigorating revenge . Photographed by Ian Jones, the film is all long shot and extreme close up, like Sergio Leone in Arkaroola. The use of paintings by Peter Coad to depict the many scenes of violence is an inspired strategy in an intriguing film.

Director Paul Goldman's Australian Rules has created concerns for Festival Director Sue Nattrass because events depicted in Phillip Gwynne's novel, Deadly Unna ?, on which the screenplay is based, bear resemblance to actual events. Continuing controversy has followed the film with some calls for its withdrawal.

Already listed for the Sundance Festival, Australian Rules, is a story of loyalty and friendship amid the racism of a seaside town and a film destined for the kind of success that has greeted Rabbit-Proof Fence. With its footy backstory, strong cinematography from Mandy Walker and fine performances from Nathan Phillips, Luke Carroll and Lisa Flanagan, it has it all - youth, a well-constructed story and a genuinely tragic seam, offset with humour and romance. It will surely provide a timely entry point to the Reconciliation debate, especially for younger audiences.

This excellent, but alas, sparsely attended season, also includes Kabbarli, Andrew G.Taylor's collage docudrama on Daisy Bates, featuring actor Lynne Murphy, and Walking on Water, a carefully crafted film by Tony Ayres. Written by Roger Monk, filmed by Robert Humphreys and set in contemporary Sydney, it gives a harrowing and convincing account of an assisted death and the shadow it casts over friends and family. Vince Colosimo, Maria Theodorakis and David Bonney are part of an accomplished ensemble.

The pick of the films, though, is Beneath Clouds, written, directed and scored by Ivan Sen and intuitively shot by Allan Collins. The synopsis - Aboriginal boy jumps jail to visit dying mother and teams up with runaway girl, from a country town, heading for Sydney - sounds like yet another road movie. Instead it is a complex portrait of two young people, played splendidly by Danielle Hall and Damien Pitt. Beneath Clouds has few gratifications, but in its stillness and wordless truth, it is a film that will travel with you a long time.

"Cinematic focus richly rewarded" The Australian, March 8, 2002, p.17.

Adelaide Festival 2002 Theatre

Published: 2002-03-08 *Adelaide Festival*

My Life, My Love by Pat Rix Tutti Ensemble Holdfast Choir State Theatre Company of South Australia with State Opera. Norwood Concert Hall, Adelaide Until 10 March. Tickets $49.75 and $44.75. Bookings: BASS 131 246

Murray Bramwell

My Life, My Love is a joint venture between State Theatre, State Opera and the Holdfast Choir. Just the sort of companies you might expect to be involved in an Adelaide Festival. Except that the 2002 program, assembled by Peter Sellars and his associates, has set out to derail expectations. The focus, this time, is local not international, the emphasis on community not individual virtuosity. Those usually without social and political power have been brought to centre stage and given a voice - and the effect is both unsettling and liberating, for performers and audiences alike.

So, it is not surprising that the Holdfast Choir is no ordinary choir, but an extraordinary group of more than seventy performers, three quarters of whom have some kind of physical or intellectual disability. Founded in 1997 by Pat Rix and Anne Thoday, the choir sets no barriers to participation, but there are no limits to expectation either.

My Life My Love is a project Rix began first with the choir, then took to State Theatre director and dramaturg, Rosalba Clemente to develop from a concert work into a full music theatre production, telling a story of star-crossed lovers and set between 1926 and the present, in Holdfast Bay, a stretch of city beach just north of Glenelg in Adelaide.

Framed by a dialogue between Pearl, an old woman (Barbara West) and the grand-daughter (Romy Loor) she never knew, My Life, My Love is a series of flashbacks of the young Pearl falling in love with Ronny (Lawrence Clifford) a young indigenous boy. He has no family, so she creates a fantastic story about his Island Girl mother and aviator father. Her own situation is much less romantic, a drunken father and a defeated mother, and times in the Depression are hard for everyone. Pearl and Ronny grow into adults and there is the prospect of marriage, but for a letter never delivered.

My Life, My Love is a melodramatic tale that would make even Dickens blush but, lifted by the enthusiasm of the performers, it subverts much of its own earnestness. From State Opera, Jennifer Kneale, as young Pearl, and Brian Gilbertson, as the pilot, bring flair to Pat Rix's very hummable score and from State Theatre, Mark Shelton conjures some delectable lighting for Cath Cantlon's set, a jetty and a series of tiered platforms for the choir and orchestra who, swathed in green and grey, sing not only with full voice but full hearts as well.

It is a great ensemble achievement. But I must, nonetheless, mention Barbro Spry for her zany show-stopping solo as the Owl, and the perfect timing from Joel Hartgen in the chiming of the clock. They are moments of true theatre.

"Subverted melodrama" The Australian, March 8, 2002. p.17.

Adelaide Fringe Theatre

Published: 2002-03-18 *Adelaide Fringe*

Shut Up and Love Me Karen Finley Union Hall, Adelaide University until 15 March. Bookings FringeTIX 08 8201 4567. All tickets $36. Brisbane and Sydney dates

Murray Bramwell

The Adelaide Fringe has been going gangbusters. Already a week ago, more tickets had been sold than 2000 - an increase of forty percent - and, running seven days after the truncated Adelaide Festival, that margin is likely to increase. Especially with imaginative local work such as Fresh Track's production of Reg Cribb's play The Return directed by Geordie Brookman, and this week's opener Swallow Me, written by recent Festival emerging playwright award winner Josh Tyler and featuring Rory Walker. The Fringe has been full of beans - not least the grunge energy of Sydney troupe, Acrobat and comedy favourites such as Rich Hall.

The international program has been stronger than ever with new seasons this week from Susannah York on the love of Shakespeare's women, French Canadians Les Deux Mondes' Leitmotiv and Bette Bourne, channelling Quentin Crisp in Resident Alien.

But the cult headliner has to be New Yorker Karen Finley. Back for the first time since 1994, her new show, Shut Up and Love Me, shows why she is still the poster girl for performance theory. Her show is brimming with discourses - on gender, representation, commodification and the performing body. Her show is also accessible, bawdy, endearing, alarming and confrontational - and, as ever, is dragging in a wide range of devotees.

Of course there is the shock. Finley lounges lasciviously on a red chaise longue before breaking into a frenetic parodic striptease, twiddling her nipples and generally burlesquing burlesque. She talks to the audience with an easy friendliness one minute then, taking sheets of script, begins hypermanically recounting tales of sex in the city in a series of screeching voices, erotic cadences, and Beat rhythms and repetitions that would warm the heart of Allen Ginsberg.

Karen Finley leaves no taboo unturned - whether war, incest or other features of the ever-lasting secret family. She also creates an inviting comic domain that demystifies anxiety and hostility by laughing hysterically in its face. She is naked half the time but it is neither prurient nor gratuitous. Her performance is not new any more - it is classic avant garde, reminding us how much the puritans have been closing up the borders again. So when she pours the honey for the finale, it is a feminist woman's sweet revenge.

"No Taboo Unturned" The Australian, March 18, 2002, p. 15

Fringe Wrap

Published: 2002-04-01 *Adelaide Fringe*

Reviewed by Murray Bramwell

Things were always going to go well for the Fringe this year. Everything, from the logo launch of that underdog-looking little bambi to the setting up of its ambitious on-line ticketing, had an assurance and energy about it. This not only came from director Katrina Sedgwick, CEO Jodie Glass and an army of workers and volunteers but was evident in the vibrant response from an Adelaide crowd looking for something more edifying, and certainly more entertaining, than the previous six months of divisive politics, and national and international trauma.

People were ready to have fun and grab the last of the summer we almost didn't have. And the venues worked better this year. The use of the Adelaide Uni Union and Cloisters area created a central and coherent group of performance spaces which included Union Hall and the Scott Theatre, and existing catering facilities were handy as well. Then, the carnival atmosphere at Rundle Park, with the circus adrenaline of the Lunar Tent and the Edwardian charm of the Spiegeltent, made the whole of the East End again the buzzy place to be.

The numbers are in for 2002 and The Fringe has cleaned up. 180,000 tickets sold through FringeTix, nearly 70,000 more than in 2000 and almost double the income to artists compared with last time. It has been a very good season. This is hardly surprising when we consider the grotesquely shortened and patchy program offered by the Festival. The Fringe is unlikely to have so much fortunate wind in its sails again.

But the organisers were also a match for the challenge of increased numbers - there were relatively few reports of glitches with tickets, the security was everywhere well managed, especially on Clipsal night when some clashes of clientele might have been a possibility, and the murmurings of unhappy artists have been virtually non-existent. The Fringe's Maria Foundas also maintained excellent publicity communication throughout the season with email bulletins daily and cordial media dealings.

The program, as I have noted before, had a solid core of the tried and true. The comedy was very much the usual whatsinames - Lano and Woodley, Scared Weird Little Guys, Three Canadians, Adam Hills and Judith Lucy. But judging by the queues along Angas Street and the huddled masses around the Nova there was no shortage of takers for any of the funnies. Certainly Greg Fleet was in good fettle with Better off Dead (Dad), an unsettling but amusing serve on his absent father and Rod Quantock, back with his whiteboard, his genial scepticism and the lessons of history, apologised for the ferocity of his show's title- Scum Nation. He had to come up with a name for the Fringe's October deadline he said, adding slyly that he hadn't realised how contented we would all be feeling by March.

There were some late scratchings - Arj Barker didn't show, nor did we find out anything about Growing Up Brady from Barry Williams. But Otis Lee Crenshaw, the jailbird alias of American comic Rich Hall, made a welcome return. Even though his material is showing signs of recidivism, he is still a master comic. He works mercurially off the crowd - he understands Australian audiences well - and the sheer intelligence of his satire is always exhilarating.

There was a ton of theatre. Some fine local productions such as Brink's Killer Joe and Bluetongue Theatre's Wit offered return seasons. Fresh Track productions literally did so with a new venture from recent Flinders University drama graduates, The Return, a tightly scripted set of chinese boxes about a group of people on a late night Fremantle train ride, came from new writer Reg Cribb. Directed by Geordie Brookman and featuring strong performances from Alistair Scott-Young, Melanie Vallejo and Caleb Lewis, the play has interesting ironies and reversals - and perhaps one falling veil too many. But Cribb is a confident new writer and this production may yet get a greenlight for a season in Seattle.

Another new local work which hit the mark is Budgie Lung's production of Josh Tyler's Swallow Me, a zany study of an agoraphobic golfer invaded by a series of visible relatives and invisible friends. The membrane between reality and coked-out delusion is very thin as Rory Walker as Greg, brings a manic comedy to Tyler's take on the brainclutter of contemporary life - indicated by the bewildering bank of TV screens in Louise Dunn's browned over design. Director Ross Ganf has successfully captured the mix of serious reflection and hypercomedy which is, recent emergent playwright award winner, JoshTyler's droll territory.

Regular visitors to the Fringe are Seattle's Theatre Simple. This year they brought Strindberg in Paris and 52 Pick Up, the latter a diverting two hander played by Llysa Holland and Andrew Litzky. The performers enter and strew the stage with a pack of cards each linked to a short script - ranging in duration from seconds to several minutes - thus randomly sequencing a narrative of relationship issues, snoring, first time sex, psychics and cranberry juice. Written by Rita Bozi and TKJ Dawe, 52 Pick Up is a deal of wit and closely observed detail ably presented by Holland and Litzky with brisk direction from K Brian Neel who also had two much-praised Fringe shows of his own - Double Climax and the sci-fi solo The 42nd Floor. I missed them both and they are at the top of this year's regret list.

The raft of international productions brought in by Arts Projects Australia gave the Fringe plenty of lift - the aerialists of Les Arts Sauts certainly, but also fabrik and DO Theatre's Hopeless Games and Theatre O's Three Dark Tales. Saxophonist Jan Garbarek and choral group, the Hilliard Ensemble played a splendid set of material not just, as advertised, from their 1994 Officium collaboration but also from the more airy and varied Mnemosyne CD which was released on the ECM label several years ago. It was the delight it promised to be.

With the shortened Festival run, the final week of the Fringe was all box office gravy. It also had events likely to catch those hankering for the world elsewhere. New York performance artist, Karen Finley's Shut Up and Love Me provided her trademark shock not seen here since 1994. This time round Finley has mellowed, there is less of the stridency that pierced some of her earlier shows and more gusto and comedy instead. She is now a mother and in her late forties and her observations on sex and relationships, while still confrontational enough to have the audience squirming, have a more Chaucerian bawdiness.

Occasionally sprawled on a coquettishly scarlet chaise longue, she navigates through a succession of anecdotes, beat poems and striptease displays that burlesque the very idea of burlesque. Her finale is a naked romp in honey, poured by several willing volunteers, while she recites scabrous pastiches of Eeyore and Winnie the Pooh. It is vintage avant garde - and some would say that it is very old chapeau. But the predominantly young audience was quite agog seeing a bit of old-fashioned feminist transgression and Karen Finley is still finding new ways of getting beneath the skin.

For those hoping to hear some trippingly spoken Shakespeare sixties starlet, Susannah York offers only a lot of actorly display and a few stumbles. Her show, The Love's of Shakespeare's Women is an appealing collection of speeches - from Viola, Hermia and Cleopatra, several sonnets including, predictably, Let Me Not to the Marriage of True Minds, and such likely ladies as Juliet and Lady Macbeth. Ms York is often ill-at-ease, lacking fluency in the links and performing the lines with an efficient but unilluminating elocution. You would have though that the revolution in making Shakepeare's language sound like meaningful sentences had never happened.

Also in the last week were two shows at the Festival Centre. Leitmotiv from the French Canadian company Les Deux Mondes has spectacular lighting and screen projections from Yves Dube with a booming synth score by Michel Robidoux. Mezzo soprano Noella Huet was unable to sing on the night I attended and the company worked valiantly to re-work the performance with pre-recorded material. The story of Rosa (Huet) and her lover Pierre and the daughter abandoned in the turbulence of wartime is visually dazzling but rarely touches the emotions.

Bette Bourne as Quentin Crisp, the Resident Alien, is, by contrast, most engaging. Tim Fountain's text is amusing and lightly judged but the portrait of the naked civil servant, the fearlessly singular Crisp, turning ninety, still openly homosexual and living on his wits in America is a memorable essay on the courage of originality and the integrity of not just saying who you are, but being who you are.

The Adelaide Review, No.223, April, 2002. pp 13-14.

The Festival That Was

Published: 2002-04-01 *Adelaide Festival*

Reviewed by Murray Bramwell

It has been said that the 2002 Adelaide Festival has been misunderstood, that it was too innovative and far-sighted to be fully comprehended. That its impact will not be realised for years, say some. For a decade, says the former Director.

On the contrary, the Festival was very clear. Its purpose was empowerment and recognition to groups and creativity usually marginalised or colonised by hierarchical concepts of high culture. It was to privilege the local and the communal against the individual and virtuosic. It was to make us get real about the serious failures of our society to deal with Indigenous and social justice questions and to recognise that screen and media forms are the dominant modes in the digital economy.

One of the complications in dealing with Peter Sellars' vision is that his views are both prescient and cliched, freshly perceptive and, in the ways he himself frames them, hackneyed and unexamined. It is undoubtedly true that he took the Indigenous content of the Festival further than had hitherto been the case. I have previously noted Robyn Archer and Barrie Kosky's achievements but Sellars pushed the idea further.

In reclaiming Victoria Square as Tandanyungga and staging a series of cultural performances from various parts of Australia as well as New Mexico, South Africa and Aotearoa New Zealand, he and the associate directors made not only South Australians, but a national and international audience, pay attention to Aboriginal culture and the themes of Truth and Reconciliation. For eight days Indigenous artists were high profile guests in our city who not only performed memorably beside the imperious statue of Queen Victoria but attended performances in the Playhouse and participated in ceremonies and workshops at various venues around the city.

It has been reported that many valuable cultural interchanges took place - in the Intertwine project and during other cultural residencies. Among the scheduled performances, Black Swan's The Career Highlights of Mamu presented a complex and sometimes rickety mix of oral history, theatre and traditional dance. In Skin Bangarra Dance Company contrasted an aestheticised tableau of traditional women's culture with the contemporary trauma of deaths in custody, alcohol addiction and alienation among Aboriginal men. In Bone Flute, MAU Dance directed by Lemi Ponifasio, brought together, ponderously and unsuccessfully, elements of Japanese butoh with Polynesian rituals and traditions.

But, whatever their merits, these events did not add up to enough to justify the expense and the planning time of a biennial festival. Having made a claim to raise questions and showcase culture, Sellars and his group bungled their opportunity. It was always going to be controversial to promote cultural diversity in the present climate of conservatism but to do so and then botch it, is reckless and hard to forgive. The Tandanyungga program, starting with the opening ceremony was a case in point. Even though it was equipped with a state of the art sound and lighting rig, the opening night didn't have a designated stage manager and some performers were distressed by the lack of preparation and inadequate miking. The event while containing many powerful moments was framed as a kind of New Age cultural eistedfodd.

The information on the free program throughout the week was confined to the festival's impenetrable brochure and reports in the daily paper. The website was not updated nor, in the absence of registration for the media contingent, were there email notifications either. Information about the country music concert on the final Saturday, for instance, remained sparse. And certainly there were no announcements from the Festival's publicity unit that Buddy Miller, a renowned performer with the Emmylou Harris band had been added as the headliner. It was as though the free program, since it couldn't actually lose any more money, had been left to fend for itself - and the numbers, even for the hip-hop concert, suffered accordingly.

It was obvious that attendances everywhere were thin. The excellent Shedding Light program of commissioned films had nearly full houses for The Tracker and the controversial Australian Rules - although there were only three screenings in each case - but the premiere for Ivan Sen's superbly understated Beneath Clouds was scandalously under-attended, as was the first night of Tony Ayres' Walking on Water. Similarly the expanse of empty seats at the latter performances of El Nino was an eerie sight.

The additional program added by Sue Nattrass at the behest of the Festival board seems never to have grafted on to the original framework of Peter Sellars' plan. The Barbara Cook ticket prices were steep and the other solo shows - BJ Ward, Patrick Dickson's Via Dolorosa, Max Gillies and the dance works by Ros Warby and Helen Herbertson, while individually creditable, seemed forlorn and disconnected.

Of course, the woes of the 2002 Festival go back much further than Sue Nattrass' valiant efforts to consolidate it. The lengthy and costly consultation stage, then the establishment of the ten Associate Directors created an unwieldy and uncommunicative structure which was always going to be in grief. Instead of focusing himself as the narrator, Sellars dispersed the task - as well as the accountability - and created a power vacuum which became a yawning chasm.

The Associates had all of the responsibility for raising sponsorship and none of the prestige and authority needed to make that happen. They were always on a hiding to nothing and it is clear that the experience of the Festival has been traumatic for them. If my comments are harsh, they are not directed at the often inexperienced Associates who seem only to have been thwarted, and in fundamental ways unsupported.

Many things weren't right about this Festival, particularly in its organisation, and I have asked these questions before - but when, a year ago, it was all going to hell in a handcart, where was the board, where was the general manager and where was the arts minister ?

At his parting press conference Peter Sellars hinted darkly at forces arrayed against him. It is clear that he was undermined as director and that his position became untenable but not before he had hugely contributed to his own predicament. In the guise of creating a democratic decision making process, he failed to provide leadership and has still never acknowledged his lack of judgement. It seems that, even on his return, he was only claiming credit for the festival's highlights and disavowing the rest.

I have said elsewhere that this Festival was a folly but not a calamity. However, in using the idealism of its themes as a shield for mediocrity and in claiming many individual examples of cultural rapprochement as justification for squandering a considerable budget on a flimsy and undeveloped program, Sellars and other apologists have been disingenuous. The indisputable achievements this time came at a needlessly high price and it is precisely because of the importance of its objectives that this Festival should have been smarter, more creative and more strategic. And it is no good blaming the press - or the bewildered audience for staying home, or hightailing it to the Fringe.

The Adelaide Festival had all kinds of bad bounces - and of course the Fringe doesn't have to bankroll its acts, it is the arts equivalent of pyramid selling - but it could have done so much better. The staunch supporters of its ideals deserved better, the artists who participated deserved better, and those who believe that a large-scale Festival - even one with single-minded objectives - must have broad strategies and inclusive programming, deserved better.

The Adelaide Review, No. 223, April, 2002, pp 13-14.

The World to Come

Published: 2003-02-24 *WOMADelaide*

Murray Bramwell previews Womadelaide 2003

Womadelaide celebrates ten years next month and it is now a leading fixture on the city's cultural calendar. So much so, in fact, that Premier Mike Rann recently negotiated keenly to keep the event in Adelaide despite counter bids from Sydney and Melbourne. Womad UK director Thomas Brooman drove a hard bargain - as well he might, to secure one of the more successful Womad festivals anywhere - by insisting that Adelaide become an annual occasion. It remains to be seen whether this will diminish the event and its support base or whether, based on the 1999 statistic, that 90% of the audience had been to Womad previously, enthusiastic recidivists will ensure that it becomes a once a year big day out for the over-35s.

In 2004 Womadelaide comes full circle. Established in 1992 for Rob Brookman's Adelaide Festival of that year, it will again be incorporated into the program of the Adelaide Festival and organisers will be hoping that the 34% of the Womad audience who travelled from inter-state and overseas in 2001 will, next year, stay around longer for some Festival and Fringe consumption as well.

Meanwhile, the 2003 anniversary Womadelaide is soon upon us and a reminder what a benefit it is that this event began under the auspices of an arts festival and not as a make-or-break commercial pop music venture. The subsidies, hidden and direct, have been substantial over the years and have given Womad a quality in organisation and production values which is hard to match. The Botanic Park location remains a huge asset, close to the city centre but offering vast Moreton Bay figs and a green sward during our driest season.

And because so many have attended Womad previously there are many ritualised aspects of the occasion. One step inside the perimeter and the layout is reassuringly familiar, the etiquette scrupulously intact, even the weather somehow manages to be predictably ideal with sunny days and softly balmy evenings (touch wood, we are nearly a month later this year.) You'd have to say, all things considered, it is a recipe guaranteed to rise every time.

Not surprisingly, after six Womadelaides in eleven years, audiences have become familiar with a remarkable range of music. From the very first, Adelaide crowds have seen some of the very best, including the late Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Subramaniam, Youssou N'Dour and the Guo Brothers as well as pop luminaries such as Peter Gabriel and Crowded House. We have seen esoteric tuva vocalists, Sardinian folk groups, Cuban son-sters, klezmer exponents and duduk players. What used to be, unsatisfactorily, called World Music has now become music from around the world, a world now expanded to include the peripheries of Europe, Africa and Asia. There is still, perhaps, a tendency towards the exotic for its own sake, Womad as a sort of musical zoo, where the traditions, political context and cultural integrity of the material are at risk of being lost without translation and overshadowed by the festivity itself. South African performer Oliver Mtukudzi has reminded us about that in past Womad visits.

In 2001 there was an especially strong Australian component at Womadelaide and Rob Brookman made some stirring remarks about Reconciliation. Now, with international tensions as bad as they have been for twenty years, he notes that "more than 200 artists will come to us from some thirty countries and from an extraordinary array of cultural backgrounds, providing our audience with a taste of the riches our world holds beyond headlines of terror, sabre-rattling and cultural and religious intolerance."

The diversity in this year's program is undoubtedly impressive and it is hard to know where to start. Perhaps alphabetically is good. Sarod player Amjad Ali Khan promises much. Listening to a recent live recording of him playing accompanied by his two sons, I think finally we will have classical Indian music at Womad to rival the performances of Subramaniam back in 1992. Also from the Subcontinent are Rizwan-Muazzam Qawwali, Sufi devotional singers in the tradition of all-time Womad favorite, the late Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan. In fact Rizwan and Muazzam are nephews of Nusrat and part of a line of qawwali (meaning 'utterance') that spans five centuries. Their debut RealWorld CD Sacrifice to Love is an indication that Womad qawwali is alive and well. They appear early on Friday night, in collaboration with UK dubmasters Temple of Sound, - one more good reason for being punctual.

Womad first introduced electronica in 1997 with the Afro Celt Sound System and the Birmingham Pakistani group Fun-da-Mental. This year Algerian beatster Rachid Taha will make an impact with his mix of Arabic, North African and pop techno idioms. Something for younger subscribers definitely - check out his Made in Medina CD for a magic carpet ride. Los de Abajo from Mexico are also mixing traditional melodies - this time salsa styles - with rap and punk rhythms and a hint of Ricky Martin. Their most recent CD, Cybertropic Chilango Power, is quite a party, released on David Byrne's Luaka Bop label.

For a lively mix of Cuban, jazz and contemporary dance, Cachaito Lopez and his brilliant Cuban band are the ticket. Bass player for the legendary Buena Vista Social Club he has toured widely with both the Ibrahim Ferrer and Ruben Gonzalez bands as well. His debut solo CD Cachaito (World Circuit label) is a splendid mix of Cuban grooves and the sixties sounds of Pepper, Getz and even the more accessible side of Coltrane. Percussionist Miguel Anga Diaz is a miracle and the striding, vibrant suppleness of Lopez' bass lines are hypnotic. He is seventy this year but Cachaito Lopez plays like a teenager. His set is a certain highpoint of the weekend.

The African program is always a dynamic part of the Womad festival and this year we have Burkina Faso percussion from Badenya les Freres Coulibaly, South African music and songs from storyteller Madosini, Ghanaian reggae from Papa Kwasi and the Iriehights and the Cuban influenced grooves of Senegal born Cheikh Lo whose CD Ne La Thiass (World Circuit) produced by Youssou N'Dour is reason enough for me to catch both his Saturday and Sunday performances.

In Womad 2001 Bob Brozman amply demonstrated his versatility, displaying blues, ragtime and Hawaiian styles on a variety of beautiful art deco steel bodied guitars. This time he duets with Takashi Hirayasu, an Okinawan musician with a pedigree in roots and rock music dating back to the 1970s. With Brozman he plays the sanshin, a traditional Okinawan three stringed banjo. Their CD JinJin /Firefly is a curious blend of sounds familiar and strange. It has grown on me greatly and the return this year of the hypermanic Brozman is bound to be a lively one.

I have always been a advocate of a strong Celtic contingent at Womad - because the music is so diverse and a reminder of our own links with worldwide idioms. Irish singer Cara Dillon brings a blend of traditional airs and contemporary acoustic settings in her widely praised eponymous debut CD. It is worth the price for the opening track alone - a lilting reading of Black is the Colour. She plays on Friday and early on Saturday afternoon. Also in Celtic mode are the jig and fiddle Scottish band Shooglenifty. They created a happy ruckus back in 1997 and will again this time. My favourite CD of theirs is still A Whiskey Kiss. Also, Pelpeyu bring fiddles and bagpipes from Astarias in Northern Spain and Irish singer, now Melbourne resident, Andy White will perform.

The Indigenous Australian program is again strong this time. Singer songwriter Kerrianne Cox will feature as will the Keriba Wakai CASM Choir from Adelaide, the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Inma women dancers and Torres Strait singer King Kadu. Also, Drum Drum from Fiji will open the card on Saturday.

The 2003 line-up is again large and various and takes a bit of navigation. Check the Womadelaide website - www.womadelaide.com.au - for more information. And to celebrate ten years of Womadelaide, a double CD has been released - one disc devoted to tracks from past favourites Nusrat, Papa Wemba, Ernest Ranglin, Afro Celt, Vika and Linda, Geoffrey Oryema, Peter Gabriel and others, the other is the 2003 program - Los de Abajo, Cheikh Lo, King Kadu, Cara Dillon, Cachaito Lopez, Rachid Taha, Rizwan-Muazzam Qawwali and more. It is available at Big Star and other stores. Womadelaide runs from 7-9 March.

"The World to Come" The Adelaide Review, No.233, February, 2003, p.21.

World Peace

Published: 2003-04-01 *WOMADelaide*

Womadelaide 2003 Botanic Park

Reviewed by Murray Bramwell

Womadelaide is not just a highly successful musical occasion, it is a key fixture in the Adelaide cultural calendar. That is made clear enough at the afternoon press call before the Friday night opening. All the major players are there. Kate Brennan, on behalf of the Adelaide Festival Centre, is taking a last opportunity to claim sovereignty over Womad in Adelaide now that the Trust is relinquishing its executive management role to ArtsSA Major Events and a much more direct link to Premier Mike Rann.

The Premier speaks strongly in support of Womadelaide, of his titanic struggle to wrest it from the hands of Sydney and Melbourne interlopers, and its strategic significance - in tandem with his current pet project, the Adelaide International Film Festival - as the March highlight in the Festival off-year. He, along with Womad UK director, Thomas Brooman reiterates the importance of Womadelaide now as an annual event - which has many people, including Fringe organisers, wondering what sort of entertainment ecosystem we will have in Adelaide in the middle weekend of the Festival, and whether an embarrassment of riches will mean depleted attendances all round.

That remains to be seen. But in 2003, Womadelaide is as amiable and familiar and populous as ever. Event Director, Ian Scobie, from Arts Projects Australia, says that the site crew are threatening to get T shirts printed with Same As Last Time written on them, such is his unwillingness to alter a winning formula. And he is right. Where so much of our lives is subject to change - often arbitrary, on the cheap, and for the worse - it is a pleasing reassurance, arriving through the gates of Botanic Park, to see that the layout is immediately recognisable. It has been tweaked a little to minimise sound bleeds from one performance area to another, but the traditional geography enables people to identify favourite picnic spots under the trees, and establish those ritual encampments which makes Womad such a sociable event. It is like settling in for a day at the cricket.

I have said before, it is a piece of luck that Womad was first set up as a festival event and not as a stand-alone commercial venture. It has meant privileged access to leafy, green Botanic Park and production values that are quite exceptional. The sound, supervised by David Arbon, is as good this time as it has ever been - crisply clear, plenty of bass, and distortion free - and, with the precision miking now possible, even the humblest bodhran and smallest whistle can sound majestic.

The Womad landscape is an autumn delight. Complementing the natural beauty of the Moreton bay figs are the huge rippling flags designed in soft pastels by Angus Watt. Also intriguing is the sand sculpture of The Rope Story, an initiative from the Anangu Pitjantjatjara elders, and the giant video projections by Craig Walsh which, startlingly animating the trees at night, have us wondering if Tolkien's Ents have snuck into Womad this year.

The array of stalls and exhibitions continues to appeal to the random browser - it's good to see Imprints bookshop represented and the expertise of Big Star Records at the CD tent. The various caterers do well to meet the extensive demand but the food is perhaps not as varied this time round. And a couple of outright gripes - too few staff at the box office on Hackney Road mean unacceptably long and slow queues for tickets on Friday night, and, again, the toilet facilities struggle as the night queues grow longer.

So what about the music ? Overall, I would say this is the least distinguished Womadelaide so far. But I need immediately to temper that remark by acknowledging that over ten years Womad has presented work of such high calibre that it has set its own formidable precedents .This year perhaps proves most clearly that the event is now much greater than the sum of its parts. It is obvious that much of the audience is happy to wander in the park, having bought a ticket out of the rat race for a couple of days. If the music is great, that is almost a bonus.

Womad is for the overworked, the hassled, the worried well, it is where parents can let their kids roam unsupervised more than they ever can usually. The precinct is safe, there are scads of organised activities for children - the whole thing is about as placid as you can get. Even with fifteen thousand people sitting on top of each other, there is room for all. No-one gets drunk or obnoxious -or not that I saw. Everyone gives everyone else a fair go. This time especially, it is as though people know full well that the world is going to go ballistic in two weeks. So here is a place where tranquility and tolerance can be cherished.

For that reason the idea of harmony through music, for all its idealism, is a powerful one. It may be transitory, but when you have musicians from Pakistan, Senegal, Colombia, Zimbabwe, Japan, Afghanistan, Tatarstan, indigenous United States and Australia, the UK, Ireland and Mexico all gathered in one place, it is a tangible reminder that music is a language and, at the moment, a more articulate and communicative one than that of war and diplomacy.

For me, the outstanding performance is from Ernest Ranglin who, beaming his way through two of the most fluent sets of rock-steady ska, showed, with his excellent saxophonist and keyboard player, how his music can morph into jazz, reggae and rhythm and blues with equal facility and flair. At seventy he is a champion of taste and understatement. No wonder Bob Marley named him as his guru. Also, full of beans are Los de Abajo - translated meaning "those from below". They are the full-tilt voice of Mexico City. Mixing rap, salsa, Tijuana brass and funk rock with a vibrant social justice agenda, singer Liber Teran leads the ten piece band in every sense of the world. On Friday night they are fun, I get closer in on Sunday night and they are like a marvellous punky version of Spike Jones and the City Slickers. Their politics are young and brash and brave - and we need them now more than ever.

For many, West Australian act The Waifs are a discovery - and they prove a best seller at the Big Star tent - but they have spent ten long years touring and refining their fresh and tasty country blues sound. The hit song, London Still, sounds haunting among the trees as does Fisherman's Daughter and others from their Up All Night CD. The Waifs have played Big Day Out and supported Bob Dylan but they have now made big strides into the Womad constituency.

Also memorable are Indian sarod player Amjad Ali Khan who, in an ensemble including two of his sons, provides long and winding ragas for a very attentive late night crowd on Friday, and Senegalese Moslem, Cheikh Lo, whose jazzy quartet is a mix of seventies Miles Davis, Buena Vista Cuban and, with distinctive talking drum inflections, his West African heritage as well. He is a classy performer, more introverted than some of the African performers we have seen previously, but more sparing and nuanced as well.

In the Celtic idiom, Irish singer Cara Dillon performs a charming set with Sam Lakeman on guitar and second vocal and his brother Seth, prominent on piano. Dillon sings soft-trad material like Black is the Colour as well as new compositions. They set a nice ambience for Friday night in the relative intimacy of Stage Three. Shooglenifty only play once, on Friday night, and seem down on energy and dexterity while from Quebec, Les Volee d' Castors, unenticingly downbeat on Friday night, win new fans the following day at Stage Two, as do Felpeyu, from the Asturia region in north-western Spain.

Virtuoso Hawaiian style steel guitarist Bob Brozman is more muted this time, providing a showcase for his Okinawan collaborator Takashi Hiruaysu, while Zulya and her group provide an appealing set of songs from the former Soviet bloc territory of Tatarstan. Disappointing are Rachid Taha, the Algerian rocker part Springsteen, part Nick Cave, who plays a dishevelled set on Friday night and improves considerably on Saturday, Julien Jacob from Benin, who plays a very anhodyne version of Paris pop, and the clumsy collaboration between the heavy handed rhythm of UK clubsters, Temple of Sound and the Rizwan-Muazzam Quawwali - the latter redeeming themselves entirely with their own set last thing on Saturday night.

There were some acts I miss that many speak highly of - Douglas Spotted Eagle, Adelaide's own Liam Gerner, Apodimi Compania, King Kadu and South African performer Madosini for instance - but the workshops I manage to see from Cheikh Lo and Amjad Ali Khan - are a reminder that the smaller stages are full of marvellous detail and a festival in themselves.

The Sunday night All Star Festival Finale is convened by English cellist Matthew Barley. There is a silence for peace, a heart-felt poem from Irish singer Andy White, a vocal by Zulya and a number of rambling group jams led by Bob Brozman and featuring a slew of drummers from various bands, enthusiastically oblivious to Barley's attempts to keep the whole event under his baton. Ernest Ranglin plays a terrific groove and the Los de Abajo brass section shines before the over-rated Temple of Sound returns to hog the stage with a long and bombastic version of Low Rider. It funks and swings on while the audience watches somewhat bored and bewildered and when it eventually grinds to a halt there is not the crest of applause that befits the conclusion of three excellent days of Womad.

Instead, the crowd peels away somewhat awkwardly, wondering perhaps where the real headline act has got to - the Salif Keita or Baaba Maal of previous events. Looking for that upbeat finale, reverberating in our ganglia as we trudge through the park, carting our bags and blankets and already getting jazzed up for Womadelaide to start all over again next time.

"World Peace" The Adelaide Review, No.235, April, 2003, p.19.

Sights and Soundings

Published: 2004 *WOMADelaide*

Womadelaide 2004 Previewed

Womadelaide will soon be upon us: from 5 -7 March, to be exact. And, yes, it does seem like only a year ago. Now an annual fixture, Womad, this year, is tucked under the wing of the Adelaide Festival- as it was for its inaugural presentation back in 1992.

The appeal of this event is hardly a mystery - a diverse program of splendid music, impeccable production values, the green sward and shady Moreton Bay figs of Botanic Park and a very peaceable gathering of citizens who don't all have to be in the front row. As festivals go Womadelaide has redefined passenger comfort and opened our ears to the sounds of the planet.

Invariably the program is full of secrets and surprises - sometimes too many secrets and surprises. Exotic instruments, esoteric music traditions and a variety of languages and dialects. How do we get a handle on all this griot and tuva and klezmer and son ?

The Adelaide Review has assembled a punter's guide to Womadelaide 2004 - a sampling of CDs and some recommended highlights when you hit the park

Dirty Lucy Dark Green (Fish Dirt/MGM)

Led by singer Nicole Brophy and violinist Jodi Moore, Sydney outfit Dirty Lucy are every inch a contemporary girl band. That means that the raspy vibrato, the strummy guitar and the bittersweet lyrics are a little bit Ani diFranco, a dash of Kasey Chambers, a hint of Jewel and an echo of Leonardo's Bride. They are also augmented by some accomplished instrumentation - Jodi Moore's trickling mandolin on Ride, her soaring, echo-fed dervish violin on Rescue and the hoe-down pace of Can't Let Go. Dark Green is an impressive debut and by all accounts the band has gained a keen following on tour in the US and Britain. They are likely to add Adelaide to their list of admirers - especially when Jodi Moore hits that effects pedal on her six string violin

Eliza Carthy Anglicana (Topic)

As Americana describes that mix of tradition and the individual talent that characterises Gillian Welch and Wilco, so the ever-so-ironic Anglicana describes the place of Eliza Carthy in English music. Her parents, the legendary Martin Carthy and Norma Waterson, were themselves connected to the electric group Steeleye Span as well as the legendary Watersons band. Now it is Eliza's turn to make the old sound new again. It is not, however, the Doc Martins and the lip stud we should note but her bell-like voice, the authority of her arrangements and the deft choice of material. Teamed with Ben Ivitsky on guitar, John Spiers on melodeon and Jon Boden on second fiddle, Eliza Carthy recounts the melancholy fates of the Pretty Ploughboy and the Bold Privateer and then rosins the bow for a bunch of jigs. This is unerring musicianship- never shrill, never corny old folk crap. Those who saw Eliza Carthy play a gig in the Big Star basement a few years back will be first in the queue at Womad.

Abdullah Ibrahim African Magic (Enja)

Known for thirty years as Dollar Brand before his conversion to Islam, South African pianist Abdullah Ibrahim remains a major figure in jazz as this vibrant set from 2002 attests. His elegant technique, influenced by Ellington and Oscar Peterson, also has echoes of his bebop debts to Thelonious Monk. Opening with the fragment Blue Bolero, Ibrahim, with bassist Belden Bullock and Sipho Kunene on drums, delivers twenty four tracks ranging from plaintive miniatures such as Pule and the sixteen second Solitude to the cross-hatched rhythms and bass cascades of For Coltrane. The magic here is African in its complexity but the sensibility is very much New York Modernism. At seventy, Inbrahim is better than ever. His set will be a Womad highlight, no risk.

"Global appeal" The Adelaide Review, No.244, January, 2004. pp19-21.

Looking for the Laughs

Published: 2004-02-01 *Adelaide Fringe*

Fringe Comedy

Murray Bramwell

Before television re-discovered Australian humour and FM breakfast executives began strip-mining the stand-up industry, comedy at the Adelaide Fringe was all one big lucky dip where Funny Stories, LosTrios Ringbarkus, the Doug Anthony Allstars, Flacco, the Jet Black Cowboy and the Castanet Club could all be found. Now we know our comics through Rove and ABC vehicles like The Glass House so many comedians already have a profile and a pedigree.

Looking through the list for 2004 there are quite a few household names and they will be rewarded for their familiarity with queues around the block and standing room only signs. Fringe comedy is always the most popular and, one would hope, the most commercially successful category in the festival. But maybe it's starting to get a little tired. I have to say there are notable absences this year and the diversity, as in many parts of our cultural ecosystem, is starting to dwindle just a little.

Lets start with the good news. Some legends are listed here. With Gud, Paul McDermott presents his patented line in vehement wit, mixed with music from his own fine pipes and the talents of Cameron Bruce and Mick Moriarty. Dave Hughes comes out of the glass house and back to his true calling in the colosseum of stand-up and Rod Quantock, the most reasonable, funny and politically corrosive commentator in the country will provide therapeutic counsel back at the Nova. Also, Lano and Woodley, are back with the The Island a new show undoubtedly garnished with all the pratfalls, regressed physicality and social incompetence which has made them hilarious and irresistible in the past.

The Tokyo Shock Boys are back, proving, like Walt Disney's Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, that there is a new generation born every four years. Also at Her Majesty's, carrying on from the High Eighties (or is that- hiatus ?) is Natural Born Mincer, Julian Clary. Song and joke specialists Scared Little Weird Guys and Tripod are in the listings as is Wil Anderson - the execrable pun this time is Licence to Wil.

Leading the women's march is Fiona McLoughlin at the Nova, Kim Hope from the Glass House and Christine Davey with the Catchlove Sisters. Joanne Brookfield's Dog's Breakfast looks like a starter also. We note the absence of Judith Lucy, Sue-Ann Post and lament the passing of Linda Gibson whose past glories at the Fringe are indelibly recalled.

The UK invasion has again been well packaged by Mary Tobin - the Best of the Fest, Brit Com, Cream of the Irish - and in a few weeks we will know all about Neil Delamere, Karl Spain, Rhod Gilbert and the rest. Ross Noble is a definite again this time and Daniel Kitson is also a must. Arj Barker where are you ? - surely, all is forgiven ? The Comedy Gala featuring the cast of comics from the Festival play Twelve Angry Men will be a special bonus.

Adam Hills gains momentum each Fringe and we welcome him back after extended seasons in Edinburgh and London. Bryan Lynagh's Culturally Unfit is on my list , as is Hung Le and local comics Pete Monaghan, Trenwith and Fitch and the Baudrillard Brothers. Many will be intrigued to meet the real Larry Kramer and Matt Byrne's Media are having a high altitude look at Virgins.

There are other fascinating listings - Uber Alice- the Adventures of a New Zealand Manicurist and penis puppeteer, Anthony Jucha are only two of them. I am sorry that this is the first Fringe in years without either Rich Hall or Otis Lee Crenshaw, and it feels quiet without Greg Fleet. My favourite in 2002 was Bill Bailey - I wonder who we will be heralding by this time next month ?

The Adelaide Review, No.245, February, 2004. p.21.

Combing the Fringe Theatre

Published: 2004-02-01 *Adelaide Fringe*

Murray Bramwell

The official Fringe program is out and, once again, it is a humungous collection of human activity and human endeavour. Take the Theatre section, for instance. I counted ninety seven listings. That means at least ten times that many people have got themselves organised, forked out their own money and are putting on a show - for themselves, their friends, families, to impress their lovers and punish their ex-s, and to entertain the passing punters, like us, who might just step up on the night.

It is a marvellous leap of faith and deserves all the glory it can gather. The fact that inevitably some events will tumble for lack of support, and perhaps because they're not much chop, is, for the moment, beside the point. And that Adelaide has only a fraction of this activity at other times of the year is also another matter. The Fringe is that unique invitation to the whole city (and its visitors) to take a risk, see a show and try something new for once in our lives.

Of course, grappling with the choices and having any idea what we might expect is part of the fun - and the frustration - of the Fringe. Even those who follow the performing arts closely don't know where to look at Fringe time - and word of mouth is never more important than when someone comes across the Sleeper, the Surprise Hit, the Cinderella show that becomes the next Big Ticket.

Looking back over previous programs I am reminded of the past highlights. In 1998 There were the Tamarama Rock Surfers, the local new play Catskin, the talented Dawson Nichols' Edgar Allan Poe monologues, La Mama toured their Survival of the Fittest Season, and Back to Back and Handspan presented Mind's Eye. Last Fringe we saw Josh Tyler's Swallow Me from Budgie Lung, Fresh Track staged The Return, Bluetongue presented Wit, from Brink we saw Killer Joe and internationals included Karen Finley, Bette Bourne's Resident Alien, Theatre O's Three Dark Tales and Seattle's Theatre Simple presented 52 Pick Up.

In 2004 the Fringe program is similarly beckoning. There are the classics - beginning with David Malikoff's performance of the Anglo-Saxon monster epic Beowulf and Midsummer Night's Dream Reloaded from Scrambled Prince at the Mercury Cinema. Local company, Rough Magic is staging Ibsen's Ghosts at the Holden Street Theatres, directed by Alice Teasdale and featuring Michael Baldwin and Carl Nilsson-Polias.

Twentieth century Absurdist works are well represented - Waiting for Godot from Fourdoors theatre, The Caretaker by Harold Pinter from Brink Productions - excellent contributors in past Fringe line-ups also - and Ionesco's The Lesson will be conducted on the Museum Lawns.

The international contingent again includes Seattle's Theatre Simple with Notes From Underground based on the text by Dostoesvky, other works from this company include The Big Time and Parrot Fever. The Blue Orphan from Canada's Catalyst Theatre looks intriguing, and for quality children's theatre, Smashed Eggs written by Phil Porter and presented by Sulis Productions is of interest.

Arts Projects Australia who presented Three Dark Tales, Les Arts Sauts's Kayassine and Hopeless Games in 2002 have a portfolio this time featuring Horse Country by C.J. Hopkins, a comic two-hander about the state of the 21st Century, Cincinnatti a monologue from Nancy Walsh written by Don Nigro and Pandora 88 from the German physical theatre company Fabrik who toured with Hopeless Games last time. All three have fared well in recent Edinburgh seasons as has Mindbender from the Peepolykus company comprising contortionists, psychics and general free spirits.

The Fringe theatre is also the place for new Australian works and experimental projects. Budgie Lung is restaging Dark Paths a trilogy by Stephen Sewell directed by Simone Avramidis and PA City Players are doing Daniel Keene's excellent one-acter, the greyhound saga, Silent Partner at the Prince Albert Hotel. A new work X-Ray by Chris Tugwell is especially timely - a well-researched account of David Hick's incarceration in Guantanamo Bay, it will play at the AIT Arts Acting Studio in Light Square and is directed by Geoff Crowhurst.

Fresh Track Productions return after a well-received season in Edinburgh with a new production of Morph by promising new writer Brendan Cowell and directed by Geordie Brookman. Fresh Track actor Caleb Lewis will also feature in his award winning trilogy Songs for the Deaf playing at the Fringe Hub. The Border Project's Please Go Hop ! invites audiences to come and go while they mix games with dance beats and other random manoeuvres- they can be found in the new Fringe venue Higher Ground on Wakefield Street. Alternative theatre stalwarts Bakehouse are staging a double bill under the title Suburban Motel. Also worth checking out is In Winter's Discontent - a solo piece featuring the excellent William Zappa, who we will see later in the year in State Theatre's Death of a Salesman.

And then there's the physical theatre - circuses at the garden of Earthly Delights include Throw Down, The Happy Sideshow, Vitastatistix and Frumpus joint venture Crazed, Circus Monoxide, Cirkus Inferno and even Spaghetti Circus. All these people busting to please us at the Fringe - get some friends and get along.

"Fringe favourites" The Adelaide Review, No. 245, February, 2004. p.20.

Gotta get out of Displace

Published: 2004-02-24 *Adelaide Fringe*

Murray Bramwell

Horse Country by C.J. Hopkins Clancy Productions Eclipse, FringeHUB, Level 4 , Adelaide University Until 6 March. Bookings FringeTIX (08) 8100 2004. Tickets $15 - $29. Sydney season Belvoir Street Downstairs 9 - 28 March.

Cincinnati by Don Nigro Clancy Productions Eclipse, FringeHUB, Level 4 , Adelaide University Until 6 March. Bookings FringeTIX (08) 8100 2004. Tickets $15 - $29. Sydney season Belvoir Street Downstairs 9-28 March

Morph by Brendan Cowell Fresh Track Productions Little Theatre, FringeHUB, Adelaide University until 14 March. Bookings FringeTIX (08) 8100 2004 Tickets $17 -$22

Notes From Underground adapted from Fyodor Dostoevsky Theatre Simple Cinema, FringeHUB, Adelaide University until 2 March. Bookings FringeTIX (08) 8100 2004 Tickets $10 - $18.

Songs for the Deaf by Caleb Lewis Fresh Track Productions North South Dining Room, FringeHUB, Adelaide University until 14 March. Bookings FringeTIX (08) 8100 2004 Tickets $ 16- $20.

The first weekend of theatre in the Adelaide Fringe has opened strongly with a number of works interestingly clustered around the theme of imprisonment within the self. “Too much consciousness is a disease,” remarks the Underground Man in Seattle based Theatre Simple’s production of Notes From Underground, Dostoevsky’s prophetic text from 1864. Andrew Litzky’s versatile performance conjures both the desperation and ironic comedy of a man refusing to conform to the demands of his society. Part existential rebel, part George from Seinfeld, he runs like an open razor through St Petersburg causing us to laugh even as we cringe in recognition.

In the two works by New York’s Clancy Productions such displacement is also apparent. In Horse Country, Sam and Bob (Ben Schneider and Kurt Rhoads) are two guys in a bar, downing Wild Turkey and talking the time away. They talk as if their lives depend on it, like the tramps in Beckett’s Godot, except their cadences are in the hypermanic style of David Mamet. What we have here is a failure of communication, says Sam, quoting Cool Hand Luke, as the play zigzags from musings on American history and its frontier origins to the maze and the muddle of contemporary life. The actors give splendidly fluent performances, but author CJ Hopkins’s text is sometimes even more elusive than the nine of diamonds that Sam and Bob keep looking for.

Cincinnati is the title of Don Nigro’s play and it is also the site of pain. Susan teaches Philosophy and Literature and the subject of her lecture is death and suffering. Although it soon becomes clear that she is talking about herself. Nancy Walsh, directed by her husband John Clancy, brings poignant detail to a funny, bitter, sometimes terrifying portrait of a woman barely hanging on to her sanity after tragedy.

Brendan Cowell’s Morph examines the ways in which the body becomes identity. Grace Black (Melanie Vallejo) is a dancer whose strict diet and physical regimen is an end in itself and Be, (Brendan Rock) is a man literally broken by attempts at suicide. When they meet in an improbable fairytale way they transform into each other - Grace gives up her dancing while Be becomes a fitness fanatic. The cyclic nature of these changes is sardonically explored in Cowell’s imaginative but uneven text, directed by Geordie Brookman, with excellent music from Mark Harding and Liam Gerner.

Also from Fresh Track Productions is Songs For the Deaf, three short plays from talented newcomer Caleb Lewis. His writing captures the harshness and suspicion of social encounter - as in Bunny, where a young woman in a rabbit suit (Romy Loor) exits pursued by a bear. Or rather, a young man (Andrew Brackman) dressed as one. The monologue Rocket Baby features Becca, a primary school girl recalling how her dad tried to film the kids to send to Australia’s Funniest Home Videos in the hope of enticing their mother to return. Directed by Iain Sinclair, Roberta Tyrell, as Becca, ably navigates the escalating horror of Lewis’ macabre little satire.

“Gotta get out of Displace” The Australian, February 24, 2004. p.12.

Plenty of Dramas at the Fringe

Published: 2004-03-01 *Adelaide Fringe*

Murray Bramwell

The Fringe theatre program is strong this year and deserves support. Now is the time to have a binge - we won't have anything like as many chances once the Fringe and Festival tide recedes and we are back in dark old Adelaide again. We can regret that the program is a crowded one and that no-one realistically can see more than a fraction of the ninety-something theatre productions listed, but with a range of international shows on offer, as well as promising new national and local work, we have to gather those rosebuds while we may.

APA has brought in a couple of excellent pieces from Clancy Productions in New York. CJ Hopkins' Horse Country features Bob (Kurt Rhoads) and Sam (Ben Schneider), two jokers in a bar slugging back the bourbon and putting the world to rights. Freewheeling through a conversation with more revs than David Mamet they are killing time by waiting - for some poker playing Godot perhaps ? The subjects on the agenda veer through the American Century, suggesting disconnection, historical guilt and calling up nostalgia for yet more frontier now that the West has turned into LA. The actors are sharp, very skilled and fun to watch, the play is as plain as a broken chair and sometimes as enigmatic as whatever happened to that nine of diamonds.

Susan is a lecturer in meltdown. In front of her Literature and Philosophy class her subject today is death and suffering. And, it turns out, it is all about her. It has something to do with Cincinnati, a city to which she almost returns but then cannot. Her hopes, we discover, are in flames and her mind is at the edge. Nancy Walsh carries Don Nigro's perceptively detailed text with a winning mix of comic defiance and unquenchable despair.

Is there no relief from the prison of the self ? Apparently not. Theatre Simple's adaptation of Notes from Underground dramatises Dostoevsky's tract revealing, as he put it, "the real man of the Russian majority." Ninety years before Sartre and one hundred and sixty before Seinfeld, he delves the overheated consciousness of the Underground Man. Co-founder of Seattle company, Theatre Simple, Andrew Litzky, sparks and fizzles with quixotic resistance to the rules of arithmetic and the solidity of walls. Charging out into the streets of St Petersburg he recoils at the absurdity and cruelty of social encounter. It is a fine perfomance bringing what had become an esoteric text again into a familiar idiom.

A new playwright proficient in idiom is Caleb Lewis. His cluster of short plays Songs For the Deaf, from Fresh Track Productions, suggests an emerging writer of some originality. His work is a paradox because while his comedy is ferociously black it is never heartless or oversimplified and he has an ear for the manners and anxieties of contemporary Australia. In Bunny, a young woman (Romy Loor) dressed in a rabbit outfit is serenaded by a young man (Andrew Brackman) dressed as a bear. The hostility and prickliness of first encounter gives way, first to reluctant civility and then to unexpected self disclosure.

The Half Windsor is an intriguing study in the reversals of power. A homeless man (Caleb Lewis) is sleeping on cardboard on the footpath. Suddenly a well-dressed man (Roman Vaculik) not only wants to talk to him, he is ready to pay for his time, he even gives him his silk tie which he prepares in a half windsor at the tramp's regal insistence. Proof that people only really pay attention when they want something, the man wants the tramp to move because he's devaluing his newly acquired real estate. The piece ends dangerously and somewhat abruptly - it is a situation that could usefully stand some further development from the writer. .

Rocket Baby, is an award winning monologue which features Becca, a little tyke in Grade Four at Gepps Cross Primary School. She is preparing a video message for Toni Pearen. She tells her about the things that have been happening in her family, that her mum has left and her dad is desperate and wants her back. He gets the idea that if he makes a video of the kids for Australia's Funniest Home Videos their mum will see them and want to return. Roberta Tyrell skilfully unfolds the story with wide-eyed enthusiasm even as the narrative turns alarmingly bleak. Lewis' text is clever and has much to say about television as a kind of cathedral of collective fantasies and delusions, it also captures the pain for a little girl as life falls apart all around her.

Another production from Fresh Track is Morph by Brendon Cowell. Directed by Geordie Brookman who brought us the highly accomplished production of The Return in 2002, Morph is about transformation and the body as carapace. Grace (Melanie Vallejo) is a dancer obsessed with her exercises and her starvation diet, Be (Brendan Rock) is a ruffie with broken legs. He has a habit of jumping out of windows but can't seem to kill himself. With Grace he finds ambition and becomes a fitness junkie while she abandons her regimen in surrender to his influence. Both look for identity in the physical self and both disintegrate at the touch of the other.

Cowell's notion is an interesting one, even if the play does not always explore it clearly. The text has repetitions and puts pressures on actor and director to keep our attention. The music by Mark Harding and Liam Gerner certainly helps keep things on track.

From the torments of the particular to those of the generic, Crazed presented by Frumpus and Vitalstatistix takes a witty look at the slasher/horror style of B grade film of the past twenty years. The gaze shifts from slasher to slashee and the ensemble of five, led by Cheryle Moore, assembles a montage of sketches and scream-synched film footage of blondes in danger in remote locations, creepy telephone calls, sado-nurse comedy, dance routines in red sleeping bags and fangy looking hand puppets. It is an wonderfully indescribable rampage on the senses complete with the shrieking metal music familiar to the genre. The point of Crazed is very describable, however. While it is empoweringly funny, it also makes us think very hard about the misogynist and destructive reality of what we call our entertainment.

The weeks ahead at the Fringe are packed with enticements. Some of my comedy choices include Daniel Kitson, Rod Quantock, the Brit Com and Best of Fest, Lano and Woodley, I've Got a Bug, Trenwith and Fitch and the Baudrillard Brothers. And for that theatre et al we hardly ever get to see - I would like, among many, to catch - Brown, Chornobyl Story, Danny and the Deep Blue Sea, Dark Paths, Pandora 88, The Caretaker, Can't Stand Up for Falling Down, Suburban Motel, Let's Go Hop, William Zappa, more Theatre Simple and X-Ray - Chris Tugwell's account of David Hicks' unlawful incarceration in Guantanamo Bay. There are fund-raiser performances, watch out for them.

"Strength in Depth" The Adelaide Review, No.246, March, 2004. p.21.

Comedy Notes

Published: 2004-03-01 *Adelaide Fringe · Comedy*

Adelaide Fringe March 2004

Murray Bramwell

There is nothing like a visit to a psychic to give your brain a tweak and that is exactly what Michael Santos is here to do. Or maybe he will just do your head in. With Sidekick Bernard and not-very-subtle audience plant, Raymond, Santos (aka David Sant) is the Mindbender, reaching into the audience to tell us - Raymond's radio mike permitting - our names, addresses and our deepest thoughts. It is hilariously cheesy with mime gags, palm readings, lounge music and big jewellery.

However, when Michael accidentally crosses over in a heart-stopping stunt gone horribly wrong, he is guided back by angels and for a short time now has... real powers. He can guess words taken at random from books, do card tricks - is this guy for real ? In the end he can't even stay in his chair despite his handcuffs. Peepolykus have a great little show under the Umbrella Revolution. And don't forget to look out for the bit about Bonko, the gypsy bear.

Dave Hughes' career might be High Voltage with his TV, radio and live appearances but thankfully his stand-up persona is still the same laconic, socially disreputable slacker from Warnoombool who first played the Fringe as an unknown comic six years ago.

Hughes lays out his jokes like penny bangers with long fuses. He has a soporific drawl and a querulous manner - what's that all about ? he intones conspiratorially. The heat, water restrictions, Lleyton, Adelaide as a city, Guy Sebastian, collecting trolleys for Coles, his new found celebrity, girls. Standard stuff apparently, but Hughes makes seamless comedy with his endearing scepticism and his underdog intelligence. No wonder an extra show has been added on 6 March. His comedy is a sure thing.

Commissioned by The Adelaide Review but not published

Adelaide Festival 2004

Published: 2004-03-01 *Adelaide Festival*

Murray Bramwell

Gulpilil by David Gulpilil and Reg Cribb

Adelaide Festival and Belvoir Street Theatre Dunstan Playhouse Adelaide Festival Centre 11 March. Bookings - BASS 131 246 Tickets $35 - $ 45 Until 14 March Belvoir Street Company B, Sydney 7 - 24 October Tickets $ 29 - $ 43 Bookings - Ph 02 9699 3444

We have seen him as The Aborigine, as Fingerbone and as the Tracker, but never like this. I'm David Gulpilil, he exclaims, pointing his thumb towards his sleek, lean torso, this is about me. In an event that has been a long time coming, one of Australia's most accomplished and best known film actors, not to mention dancer and Marwu tribal elder from Ramingining in central Arnhem Land, is telling us about the life of David Gulpilil.

"My two legs stand in different worlds" he declares, and his one man show, co-written with Reg Cribb and directed with assured simplicity by Neil Armfield, celebrates and delves these contrasts. Framing his narrative with a riveting account of a night out on the river - "I am the real Crocodile Hunter and I feed my family too" he says with a wry smile, Gulpilil, over two hours, also tells us about his encounters with the crocodiles of the European world.

With exuberance, dignity and wit, and demonstrating his extraordinary talents as an actor, songman and dancer, he discusses the finer points of harpoons and woomeras. Then, in the first of a series of sudden shifts - not only in time but in tone - the brown calico backdrop to his campfire set becomes a screen for images of his humpy. Do you like my house? he asks with all the charm of a riddler. Do we say yes ? - when no-one in the audience would live there in a fit - or no, confirming the fact that no-one else, not least the artist Gulpilil, should be either.

These moments of confrontation are adroitly managed. The point is made but not laboured. Gulpilil mercurially navigates many moods and perspectives - some with the aid of props, including an evening suit into which he periodically steps to recall (with shrewdly selected newsreel and film excerpts) his life as a celebrity - at the premiere of Walkabout in London, at Cannes, and later at the AFI where he was honoured (belatedly, he reminded us) for his role in The Tracker.

Gulpilil talks with candour and almost unnerving directness about his problems with grog and his imprisonment for drink-driving. "In my land I feel safe", he says, "but in your's I feel that tap on the shoulder and it's hard to say no."

Stephen Page's idea to invite Gulpilil to the Adelaide Festival was an inspired one and this production is a triumph for the actor and his collaborators. David Gulpilil's courage and generosity are as great as his gifts as a performer. Anyone who is fortunate enough to see this exceptional work of theatre will never forget it.

"Standing tall in different worlds" The Australian, March 15, 2004. p.8.

David Gulpilil is a very well-known Australian. His appearances in films such as Walkabout, The Last Wave, Storm Boy, Crocodile Dundee and, more recently, Rabbit-Proof Fence and The Tracker have confirmed his reputation as one our most outstanding actors. He is also a celebrated traditional dancer who has represented Australia all over the world.

Out of the spotlight, though, his life has been very different. As a Marwu man from Ramingining in central Arnhem Land, he practises the traditions of his people, hunting crocodile and living close to the land. The life is fulfilling but it has also been arduous and, over the years, Gulpilil himself has experienced poverty, alcohol problems, depression and imprisonment.

Much has happened in his fifty years, but until he was approached by Stephen Page and Neil Armfield he had never thought of telling his story on the stage. It has been a hard process by all accounts. Gulpilil reads no English and collaborators Armfield and playwright Reg Cribb don't speak Mandalpingu. And the confrontation with past pain has been such that the actor left rehearsals to return home.

Moving but no forward address

Published: 2004-03-04 *Adelaide Festival*

Theatre

Murray Bramwell

Night Letters by writer Susan Rogers and director Chris Drummond inspired by the novel by Robert Dessaix

State Theatre Company of South Australia The Queen's Theatre Adelaide Bookings : BASS 131 246 Tickets $ 58 - $ 20 until 27 March.

Robert, the central figure in StateTheatre's Festival production, Night Letters, is described as an Australian wrapped up in language. That very aptly describes not only author Robert Dessaix but his aromatic, idiosyncratic novel - part fictional autobiography, part esoteric travelogue, part romantic storytelling, and all self-conscious literary display.

In taking up this work for the stage, writer Susan Rogers and director Chris Drummond were always going to have a steep task. I was going to say - they were going to have their work cut out for them. But that is the problem, they have not cut enough. Night Letters runs long - with intervals, almost four hours - but far more problematically, loses impact. Deference to the text has meant that the writers, and we the audience, are often lost in the lacunae.

The peeling elegance of designer Robert Cousins's Venetian cloisters are a perfect fit in the seedy grandeur of the Queen's Theatre, especially with Geoff Cobham's warm and painterly lighting. This is a handsome production, well served with original music from Zoe Barry and Quentin Grant and the opening image of Robert at his writing desk is a promising one.

The central story of an author diagnosed with an incurable illness, leaving his partner to travel serendipitously in Europe, is engaging and convincing. It is the pursuit of the parallel narratives - of the doomed Renaissance courtesan Camilla (Paula Arundell) and the very Victorian undoing of the sexual adventuress Antoinetta, (an artful Alison Whyte) - that occupy too much attention and topple the production.

As Robert, Humphrey Bower, anchors the work and captures convincingly both the flight from self and the Dantesque pilgrimage from purgatory to the paradise of acceptance. Paul Blackwell is excellent as the Professor, shamed and defeated in his pursuit of youthful eros, and Richard Gyoerffy is creepy as the amoral Emilio. Too often, though, the under-directed performances are marred by excess, and attempts to add theatricality - in the ludicrous pantomime of the brooch story and the antics of the magician - are misplaced.

This production has been a long time in the making and numerous workshops and revisions have coarsened the intimacy and the filigree elements of Dessaix's work. They have been put through a megaphone - as the stage is apt to do, amplifying when we most want sparing nuance. I am pleased to have seen this gallant production but Rogers and Drummond have turned Night Letters into a meandering epic instead of an intriguing miniature.

"Moving but no forward address" The Australian, March 4, 2004. p.14.

Simple strength betters virtuosity

Published: 2004-03-09 *Adelaide Festival*

Murray Bramwell

The Overcoat Based on stories by Nikolai Gogol Created by Morris Panych and Wendy Gorling CanStage Adelaide Festival Theatre until 6 March.

Riverland by Scott Rankin Based on paintings by Ian W. Abdulla Windmill Performing Arts The Space Adelaide Festival Centre until 7 March

The eyes have it for theatre at the Adelaide Festival. Toronto's CanStage even opens its accomplished performance of Gogol's sardonic story with projected titles - just like the movies. Without a word of dialogue, and splendidly designed and lit by Ken McDonald and Alan Brodie, the twenty two performers present a physical theatre piece reminiscent of Meyerhold's The Government Inspector and, with its giant props of machines and nib pens, Chaplin's Modern Times.

Animated, and sometimes over-propelled, by dance and piano works by Shostakovich, we see a meek clerk (played with dignity and comic angularity by Peter Anderson) experience momentary happiness in his handsomely tailored overcoat before finding his life in worse tatters than ever.

The pace and loneliness of early modern life is captured with scenes of frenetic streetcars and the hostile drudgery of offices and sewing rooms, but the imperatives of the production's spectacle keep us, for the most part, at an emotional remove from the Man's predicament, especially with the grafting of another Gogol story, Diary of a Madman, on the conclusion. Despite the wit of exchanging a coat for a straitjacket, I would have preferred Gogol's original ghostly ending - with its touch of triumphal revenge - to the complacent pessimism of CanStage's virtuosic, exacting but, ultimately, dramatically unsatisfactory parable.

Anyone familiar with the vibrant colours and evocative details of Ngarrindjeri man, Ian W. Abdulla's paintings will be especially drawn to Windmill's new work, Riverland. Directed by the talented Wesley Enoch, with bold designs from Richard Roberts, this play for young audiences brings three generations of one family to a stretch along the Murray River - between Winkie and Berri - that has been the home and singular inspiration for Abdulla.

Teenagers Luke and Milly (two more well-judged performances from Luke Carroll and Ursula Yovich) are reluctant visitors to their family lands, they'd rather be home with their friends and PlayStations. Even their Nana would rather watch Bert Newton, while their mother, an Aboriginal cultural consultant, has brought her laptop and chardonnay.

Scott Rankin's script is ambitiously satiric at times but the central story of a young man lost in the flood of 1956 and Richard Roberts' use of the deep blues and broad vistas of Abdulla's paintings, enhanced by Matt Scott's buttery lighting and songs by Stuart Day, gives this work a simple strength. Wesley Enoch's warmly managed production, with its gossiping pelicans and heartfelt themes, reminds us that it is our loss if we think there is anything naïve about naïve art. Riverland will be seen at the Brisbane Festival in September and the Perth Festival next year.

"Simple strength betters virtuosity" The Australian, March 9, 2004. p.14.

Adelaide Festival 2004

Published: 2004-03-14 *Adelaide Festival*

Theatre Murray Bramwell

First Night

Conceived and Devised by Forced Entertainment Royalty Theatre, Adelaide 10 March

I Bought a Spade at Ikea to Dig My Own Grave

Creator/ Director Rodrigo Garcia La Carniceria Teatro 12 March

The relationship between the performer and audience is ever perilous but usually it is held in equilibrium by convention and goodwill. In their high concept, high risk show, First Night, Forced Entertainment, a company whose very name is ironic, sets out to destabilise all that. They are not the first to try. Alfred Jarry's Ubu Roi in 1896 pioneered this kind of deliberate havoc, as have anti-theatre exponents such as Peter Handke, with his Offending the Audience from 1966.

Featuring seven variety performers who are as inept as they are indifferent to their tasks, First Night has blind-folded mind-readers predicting dire consequences, bigoted stand-up comedians, deliberately incompetent choreography and a striptease act which consists of popping balloons with a cigarette. It is discomforting, didactic and relentlessly withholding, as the performers constantly deconstruct what is occuring.

We have got the point, however, in the first ten minutes, and for the rest of the time are left to wonder where else it can go. Apart from one performer who insists that we forget about everything outside this theatre while she recites a long and disturbing list of taboos and traumas, there is little to engage us. Rather than robust controversy we get only sarcasm and sophistry - so the choices for the audience are either meek compliance or self-fulfilling philistinism. The concept seems to me a tired one. Besides, the theatre of excruciation is everywhere about us. Have director Tim Etchells and the other members of the company seen Steve Coogan and Ricky Gervais's The Office recently ?

I can't imagine anyone wanting product placement in I Bought a Spade at Ikea to Dig My Own Grave, a ragout of confrontational performances from Spanish company La Carniceria Teatro (literally translated - the butchery of theatre.) Opening with the brilliant and startling image of performers with credit cards bloodily wedged in their foreheads and cheeks we know we are in for an iconoclastic ride as the opening monologue by Juan Loriente jibes satirically at consumerism, tourism, mobile phones and so on.

Three players smear themselves with half-defrosted lasagne while a fourth incongruously sings an aria from Puccini. An excess of food and gluttony predominates as performers spray the stage with cornflakes and later perform grotesqueries with handfuls of pasta and franks. Like their feigned denigration of Mandela, Gandhi, Maradona and St Santiago and the blasphemous crucifixion with hotdogs, much of the unruly rebellion is more about baiting the bourgeois than making any kind of systematic statement. La Carniceria Teatro have plenty of engaging moments but, for all their sauce, they end up spraying wide of their targets.

The Australian, March 14, 2004.

Adelaide Fringe

Published: 2004-03-15 *Adelaide Fringe*

Murray Bramwell

The Return Theatre Company Nottle Eclipse, FringeHUB,level four, Adelaide University. Bookings FringeTIX (08) 8100 2004. Tickets $ 20 - $ 25. Until 13 March.

Can't Stand Up for Falling Down Aquarius Productions Cinema, FringeHUB, Adelaide University. Bookings FringeTIX (08) 8100 2004. Tickets $ 15 -18. Until 14 March.

X Ray by Chris Tugwell Directed by Geoff Crowhurst. Mongrel Productions AIT Arts (Acting Studio) 39 Light Square Bookings FringeTIX (08) 8100 2004. Tickets $ 15 - $ 23. Until 14 March.

With an estimated crowd of one hundred thousand cheering the opening night parade, a lively buzz at Rundle Park's Garden of Earthly Delights, and, by yesterday, a gross of $2.9m and 163,000 in ticket sales, the Adelaide Fringe is a conspicuous success. Boisterous doppelganger to the Festival, the Fringe is second only to Edinburgh, and like its counterpart, not only continues to thrive, but is presumed by many to be the Festival itself.

With a huge program of some 450 events, however, the Fringe runs the risk of swamping everything including itself. Life for the Fringe performer is a Darwinian struggle - not so much of the fittest, but of the loudest, the luckiest and the already familiar. It is an irony that the Fringe is considered to be the radical alternative when, for most ticket buyers, it is really the safe bet. The queues are especially long outside comedy venues and - for performers such as the slow fuse comedian Dave Hughes, Lano and Woodley with their hair-raising new show The Island and the endearingly daft English comic Daniel Kitson (all heading to the Melbourne Comedy Festival later this month) - that popularity is well-deserved.

But it is obvious that the ninety or so theatre events in the Fringe are doing it harder, especially after the first week when the Festival itself, including three days of Womad, begins to cast its shadow. Valiant companies from as far away as Seattle, Edmonton and Seoul have come to perform and after venue fees, insurance, publicity and the like, the box office from audiences of thirty or fewer is hardly going to cover costs.

It hasn't helped that some of the international productions have not lived up to the hyperbole of reviewers from the Edinburgh dailies. The Blue Orphan, a chamber musical from Canadian company Catalyst, for example, is almost ludicrously ghastly. On the other hand, while notably derivative of recent European physical theatre,The Return, loosely based on poem by Brecht, from South Korea's Theatre Company Nottle and directed by Won Young Oh, has an intriguing presence which supersedes those ubiquitous images of trilby hats, overcoats and battered suitcases.

Memorable work has also come from closer at hand. From Melbourne, Aquarius Productions' Can't Stand Up For Falling Down is a Fringe highpoint with a strong text from Richard Cameron and well-judged performances from Nicola Leona, Sharyn Oppy and Bernadette Schwerdt. A grimly convincing account of domestic violence and gender abuse, the three monologues, astutely directed by Jess Kingsford, interweave and build with disturbing impact.

Adelaide company Mongrel Productions has found an equally timely subject with X-Ray, Chris Tugwell's powerfully factual and understated account of David Hicks' internment at Guantanamo Bay. Locked down in his infamous 2.4 metre cage with 24 hour light and sound, we see Hicks (Nathan O'Keefe), eating Frootloops for breakfast and led manacled to the latrine by his unquestioning guard (James Edwards). Terry Hicks and his lawyer attended the matinee - reminding us that perhaps the real subject of the drama, as distinct from the case, is not the foolhardy boy but the devoted and courageous father.

"Gems at risk of being swamped" The Australian, March 15, 2004.p.16

Adelaide Festival

Published: 2004-03-16 *Adelaide Festival*

Murray Bramwell

2004 would be the Recovery Festival for Adelaide. That has been the received wisdom ever since the 2002 event ended in inglorious shambles. The experience with iconoclastic American director Peter Sellars had been financially and organisationally traumatic.

What especially rankled was Sellars' refusal to go on what he himself called a "cultural safari" - to bag big ticket items from overseas. Forever at the centre of Euro-American culture himself, Peter Sellars had no notion that festivals such as Adelaide's offer a unique opportunity for audiences, including local artists, to see challenging new work.

The post -2002 reconstruction has restored much of this. With the appointment of Stephen Page and the consolidation of a team including General Manager Simon Bogle and programmer Kate Gould, things would get back on track. Page has proven to be an ideal choice. With his modest and direct style, he has not only restored integrity to the Festival he has brought optimism and respect.

Although caught in the political flak of 2002 himself and beset with personal tragedy during that time, he has been constant and committed to his task. Promising to return to the "Mother Festival" he even added a touch of mysticism to the pragmatic task of attracting back sponsors and reclaiming the pre-eminence of the forty year brand that Adelaide can claim for a festival that has, until recently, been ranked alongside Edinburgh and Avignon.

In 2004 Stephen Page has put together an enticing and easy-going festival on a limited budget. Tickets sales have been excellent - latest figures announced on Sunday indicate that the Festival reached box office targets the week before it opened and then went 40% above that. Sixty performances sold out with many others exceeding 80% houses. This compares very favourably to 2002, as do overall attendances of an estimated 360,000, including Womadelaide, reintroduced to the Festival for the first time since 1992.

So, while Page's Festival stacks up well against its predecessor and is already being proclaimed the best in twenty years, it would be unfair to the facts to suggest that this smaller venture in 2004 can hold a candle to those directed by Barrie Kosky and Robyn Archer, or further back, to those of Rob Brookman and Christopher Hunt.

That is to say, you can't have everything. And, in gathering together programs in music, dance and theatre which have often struck more of a chord with general audiences than with reviewers and seasoned festival patrons, Stephen Page has staged an accessible and profitable festival rather than a distinguished one.

The dance section was always going to be strong given Page's own high standing as artistic director of Bangarra Dance Theatre. Alan Brissenden, dance critic for The Australian, describes the program as "impressive, varied, but mostly flawed." He praises the beauty of Frances Rings' Unaipon but notes the obscurity and excessive length of the other sections of the Bangarra Triple Bill. He remarks on the energy and imagination of Emilio Greco/PC's Conjunto di Nero and the brilliance in conception of Australian Dance Theatre's Held - for many a festival highlight.

"Of the two major companies," he adds, "The Ballet Nacional de Espana brought a glossy, over-refined and highly theatrical show with a real star in Esther Jurado. But we had the best first - the Australian Ballet's Tribute to George Balanchine gave us three of the great choreographer's finest, danced with elan, accuracy and sparkling assurance."

Noting that music had sometimes been lost in previous festivals, critic Graham Strahle from the Australian commends Page for his breadth of choice. "Peter Sculpthorpe's Requiem caught the audience's imagination as a gesture towards reconciliation. The first of the events to sell out, the Requiem, was for me the single most memorable event of 2004 and Elena Kats-Chernin's chamber opera, Undertow gave the festival a much needed credibility."

Notably this festival has pleased audiences with familiar high profile artists such as Bryn Terfel and Ivan Rebroff, as well as mainstream programs of Dvorak and Mozart from the highly rated Prague Chamber Orchestra.

In theatre there have been some real crowd pleasers. Several from the Edinburgh Fringe - 100 and Twelve Angry Men have, along with The Overcoat, and Circus Oz and Rocket and Roxy's Stunt Show at the Universal Playground, given the festival a more entertaining image, while experimental works - from Forced Entertainment and La Carniceria Teatro - have been mixed experiences of limited quality. State Theatre's Night Letters, adapted from the novel by Robert Dessaix has divided audiences exactly as a festival premiere should.

Stephen Page has had some of his greatest success with indigenous works, such as the theatre premieres of Riverland, a charming work for young people based on the paintings of Ian W. Abdulla, and the Festival triumph, Gulpilil, a project Page himself initiated.

There are many elements which make up a successful festival. The weather in Adelaide has been balmy and the nights clear. The crowds at Writers' Week and Artists' Week have been at record levels and the increased numbers at the splendidly organised festival-within-a-festival, Womadelaide, have clearly been unaffected by competition with the Fringe and the rest of the program in the second weekend.

This has been a favoured festival and a hugely good natured one. Stephen Page has brought the warmth of his personality and a refreshing lack of hype which is greatly to his credit. His successor, Brett Sheehy, has much to aspire to in his fixture in 2006 and he is already firing warning shots about the need to boost funds and the increasing heat of competition, especially from Robyn Archer in Melbourne.

He is dead right, and he has some hard decisions to make in his programming. 2004 has been a popular, but unambitious, festival which has greatly pleased the people who paid for it - the citizens of the city. If the Adelaide Festival is to maintain its triple AAA rating internationally, however, Sheehy will have to use his stronger Australian currency cleverly and raise the bar quite a bit higher than this year.

"Heart and box office won, minds yet to follow" The Australian, March 16, 2004, p.14.

Keeping Up the Traditions

Published: 2004-04-01 *WOMADelaide*

Womadelaide 2004

Murray Bramwell

This year was going to be a testing one for Womadelaide. It was the beginning of annual stagings of the event and the first time, since inception in 1992, that it had been re-incorporated into the Adelaide Festival. Attendance figures show that Womad this year has been the best ever with figures of 70,077, up by several thousand on 2003 and around six thousand from 2001.

It is certain proof of the durability of the event and the loyalty of its crowds. It is also tribute to the immutable rituals that have been established and maintained. It is said that some 80% of ticket purchasers have been to previous Womads. With such recidivism goes a strong vote of approval.

There is a very conspicuous Info booth on site at Womad and with very short queues. The reason is that people know the drill. Where so much else is in our lives is tinkered with and changed, often for the worse, the landscape and protocols of Womad are kept intact. The continuing availability of Botanic Park remains a boon - green and cool when the rest of the city is parched, its expanse and its ample shade make Womad a continuous picnic.

Then the layout itself remains the same. Stage One is where it was last time as are the other five - even if the Dell continues to suffer sound bleeds from the adjacent venues. The catering outlets, the stalls selling clothes and paraphernalia and the CD tent are all present and correct. ,

The secret of Womad's success is that after initial subsidies from the Festival it has received continuing funding to maintain its high production values. The numbers attending are strong but they are not overwhelming to the site and the level of passenger comfort is high. The sound quality at the stages is excellent - again Dave Arbon and his team have done well - and with a more sedate audience demographic few feel compelled to crowd the front rows, preferring to spread out among the trees for what is often a better earful, even if the view is distant.

The music program in 2004 has also been a strong one. From the ceremony of the Kaurna welcome from the Paitya Dancers to the final set from Youssou N'Dour, Womadelaide this year showed a renewed affirmation of traditional culture. There is always a tension in the program between innovation and popular style and esoteric and regionally specific work.

Those moments that we savour as Womad memories - in past years supplied by the likes of violinist L. Subramaniam, duduk player Djivan Gasparyan and the tango stylings of Cesar Stroscio - are often the quieter, lyrical ones. In 2004 such indelible sounds came from tabla player Zakir Hussain, a legend with cross-over jazz musicians such as John McLaughlin and Jan Garbarek and equally at home with Indian drum masters and sarangi player Sultan Khan. Their recital at Stage Two on Friday night was at the Nusrat hour - that point late in the night when the crowd is particularly focused in on music that is often unfamiliar but powerfully affecting. No-one who heard Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan performing at one o'clock in the morning will forget that experience.

A different traditional sound is Eliza Carthy singing from her recent Anglicana release. She has a cheery stage presence to match her gift for melancholy as she performs As I Walked Out One Evening and 10,000 Miles. Her three man band provide a nimble but subtle frame for Carthy's evocative fiddle playing and her bell-like singing. Other women singers at Womad also excelled this time - Algerian Souad Massi has a fine voice even if her repertoire is more reflective of her Parisian base and Greek singer Savina Yannatou is a most interesting performer with songs ranging from the Greek Islands, Lebanon, Sardinia, Bulgaria and Provence. Accompanied by a gifted band, Yannatou displays amazing vocal skill and sensitivity to her diverse repertoire. She remains one of the undervalued acts this year - have a listen to her CD Terra Nostra, beautifully recorded by the prestigious ECM label.

The workshops provided new insights yet again - Egyptian Australian musician Joseph Tawadros gave an oud recital under the Moreton Bay figs on Sunday afternoon and livewire Algerian singer Hamid Baroudi coached a group of audience volunteers in an improvised performance which revealed that the best musicians are often the most generous teachers also.

Womadelaide promises variety and nuance and this year delivered with Abdullah Ibrahim and his trio bringing modernist piano jazz to the event for the first time. Tinariwen from Mali must rate as the strangest act - dressed in Tuareg robes and playing riffs fascinatingly close to Bo Diddley, they also contributed to Zakir Hussain's All Star Jam which, thanks to the subtlety of Hussain and Sultan Khan's musicianship, turned an uncertainty into a highlight.

And this year's headliner really was a headliner. Youssou N'Dour who astonished crowds in 1992 did so again this year. With his sprightly band, Super Etoile de Dakar, this brilliant Sengalese singer and composer brought together the proceedings to make the final night one of the strongest in a long time. Youssou N'Dour makes exciting music which is also full of shading and lyricism. The traditional talking drum is equally valued to the electric instruments and the range of songs encompasses not only the top 10 hit Seven Seconds but the traditional strains of Li Ma Weesu from the new album Nothing's in Vain and, from 1999's Joko, Liggeey, Beykat and his anthem, New Africa.

With his haunting vocal range and his commanding presence Youssou N'Dour not only bestrides the stage like a prince, he is an eloquent spokesman for change. It is fitting that he should strike the last notes of the evening. Walking through the park, past the hypnotic fire installations of La Compagnie Carabosse, while he finishes his final encore, you could not wish for any more.

"Affirmation for Tradition" The Adelaide Review, No.247, April, 2004. pp.20-21.

Festival's Defining Moment

Published: 2004-04-01 *Adelaide Festival*

Murray Bramwell

Let's start with Gulpilil. A project initiated by Festival director Stephen Page and Belvoir Company B director Neil Armfield, this theatre monologue featuring one of Australia's most distinguished screen actors was the subject of much speculation. There was talk that the rehearsals weren't going well, that they were taking place in a cave in the Blue Mountains, that David Gulpilil was finding it all too much and had gone back to his home in Ramingining in Arnhem Land. Even Page conceded, with his trademark candour, that he was worried that this Festival commission might not happen.

Perhaps it was the fragility of circumstances that contributed to this production being such an exceptional event. Certainly, David Gulpilil is an extraordinary artist and his life encompasses the very best and the most appalling aspects of this country. As he says himself - "I was born with two legs and those legs stand in two different worlds" - and in just over two hours, seated by his campfire on the Dunstan Playhouse stage, he describes what it is to be a Marwu man, a crocodile hunter with traditional harpoons and woomera, and an Aboriginal living in reduced circumstances on tribal land.

"Do you like my house ? he asks, as a slide is projected on the canvas backdrop on the stage. It is his humpy, a ramshackle hut of corrugated iron. We are not sure we do like it, and Gulpilil is playing us along. "I'll sell it to you," he jokes raucously, "twenty bucks."

I was prepared for his charisma but not the exuberance and generosity of David Gulpilil's stage presence. As a dancer he has inexplicable grace and his skills seem almost magical - especially when he morphs into animal totems of kangaroo and crocodile. Writer Reg Cribb and director Neil Armfield have given the production shape without constricting the kind of spontaneity that it needs to keep fresh and a little unexpected. Apparently running times have varied as Gulpilil has warmed to the very new experience of being his own subject. This is about me, he repeats emphatically.

And it is an unvarnished story - full of incident about the making of Walkabout, attending the premiere in London and visiting Buckingham Palace, as well as of the difficulties he has faced with grog and, for drink driving, a prison sentence also. What is so moving about Gulpilil, the stage work - and Gulpilil, the man - is the exemplary way that he has risen above bitterness and anger. His strength is in his character, his prodigious gifts and his remarkable resilience.

Another success for Stephen Page has been the inclusion of Windmill Performing Arts' production, Riverland. Like Gulpilil, it is a work with indigenous themes that brings audiences - in this case young people in particular - close to its subject in positive and constructive ways. Written by Scott Rankin and directed by Wesley Enoch, Riverland uses inspiration from the paintings of Ian W. Abdulla, depicting memories of his childhood spent along the banks of the Murray between Winkie and Berri.

Capturing the expansive brilliant blues and poetically comic details of Abdulla's paintings, designer Richard Roberts creates a practical decor which can tell the story of two urban kids, Luke and Milly, on a reluctant camping holiday alongside a ghostly tale of a forebear who perished in the 1956 flood. Luke Carroll and Ursual Yovich are excellent in the leads and the combination of Matt Scott's warm lighting and Stuart Day's gentle songs makes Riverland, not only a fresh take on questions of identity, but a work of real charm as well.

Two of the works in the international theatre program have come on from the Edinburgh Fringe. 12 Angry Men proves, all over again, what a bullet proof script Reginald Rose wrote for American television back in 1954. Set entirely in a jury room, it remains a durable piece both dramatically and in its concerns. Perhaps fifty years later the times are rather similar. Rose addresses a society paranoid with suspicion and division from the McCarthy scourge and individuals losing sight of what it means to be a citizen.

Director Guy Masterton brought together a group of comedians to perform this revival, although for the most part that idea is lost on Australian audiences since few, if any, are recognisable. It would be a different matter if we were seeing Messrs Clarke, Dawe, McDermott, Quantock, Jimeoin and so on. You'd have to say that a bunch of comedians look like a jury- all shapes and sizes. Unfortunately the performances are equally uneven, not helped by some glitches with the radio mikes.

Owen O'Neill is a steady presence as the dissenting Juror 8, Phil Nichol unnerving as the racist Juror 10 and Australian ring-in Cliff Ellen shows the discretion of the elders as Juror 9. But while the ensemble delivers robustly, it is the play which is the triumph. Still as deftly paced and neatly crafted as ever, it makes most current script writing look like a capital crime.

So if you could take just one memory into the afterlife, to the exclusion of all others, what would it be ? You have sixty minutes to decide and if you don't you are doomed to remain in limbo. That is the premise of 100 created by Diene Petterie and Christopher Heimann for theimaginarybody from the UK.

With its single setting and a framework of five stories the appeal of 100 is its simplicity and the directness of its performances. Pip Donaghy is the Guide, prompting the others like a game show host. In fact, it is the riddling nature of the piece that provides the hook. Many have picked 100 as their Festival highlight but while concise and smoothly presented, it is a lightweight work which hinges on a parlour game idea. And with its white rehearsal costumes and conspicuous use of bamboo poles as improvisation props, even though its subject is the afterlife, 100 is also rather dated.

CanStage's The Overcoat, created by Morris Panych and Wendy Gorling , is a mainstage spectacular with smart lighting from Alan Brodie and a cinematic design by Ken McDonald. With its modernist browns, big props of factory machinery and its regimented ensemble movement (set to the cracking pace of Shostakovich waltzes and ballet works) The Overcoat tells the familiar story of the individual reduced to an unvalued cipher. But for all its tragedy it is oddly unaffecting. And in arbitrarily tacking on the ending of Nikolai Gogol's other famous story, The Diary of a Madman, Panych and Gorling replace the strength of the original ending - the man's triumphant revenge for his stolen overcoat - with the defeatist and psychologically baffling conclusion in an asylum.

Festivals are inevitably the time for works of confrontation and controversy but this year's items proved more irritating than illuminating. Forced Entertainment's First Night is very much a concept piece. A cast posing as an incompetent variety act breaks all the rules of performance by interrogating the audience instead of pleasing them, withholding from them rather than providing gratification.

Forget that we have seen its like before and consider how it might work for a hundred minutes. It works for ten - if you're lucky. Then, if the performances - stage psychics, dance routines, bigot comedy - are without merit, we start to look for other redeeming elements. Unfortunately First Night is bound up by a single idea which is really non-negotiable as the performers indicated at the first of a heckler. It is brave to be unpopular but not to be so unintelligent. But for the long monologue telling us to put aside the cares and traumas of the world while copiously listing them, First Night is a conceit that rests on a vanity.

I Bought a Spade at Ikea to Dig My Own Grave from Spanish company Teatro di Carniceri is a more boisterous kettle of half frozen lasagne. Funny at times, deeply grotesque at others, it is surprisingly low key in its presentation. It works best when more personally focused - the account of a series of dysfunctional Christmas Days for instance. When it gets more rhetorical, as it does with lists of corporate brands and mock abuse of Mandela and Gandhi - the anarchy becomes tedious. The best image is still those credit cards wedged into foreheads and cheeks that stared so disturbingly from the pages of the Festival program.

State Theatre's contribution to the 2004 Festival is Night Letters, based on the novel by Robert Dessaix and adapted to the stage by Susan Rogers and Chris Drummond. It has been a long time in the On Site Laboratory and despite extensive workshopping I think it is misconceived. Set in Sydney and Venice Dessaix's idiosyncratic novel is part memoir, part travelogue, part reverie about characters from the Venetian past. The central narrative about Robert, a man who, on discovering he has an incurable illness, leaves his partner to travel whimsically where his inclination takes him, is vivid and engaging - particularly with a strong lead from Humphrey Bower and an excellent peformance by Paul Blackwell as the professor.

The parallel stories of the courtesan Camilla and the free-spirited Baroness Antoinette are far less engaging and take up too much exposition. The result is a work that is overlong and often tiresomely over-acted. Designer Robert Cousins does well with the piazza design, lit like an oil painting by Geoff Cobham but director Chris Drummond has problems with the depth of the Queen's Theatre stage and the actors labour to project. Night Letters has much to admire but is not a success. It has been writ large rather than turned into the chamber work that most suits Dessaix's achievement.

"Festival's Defining Moment" The Adelaide Review No.247, April, 2004. pp. 18- 19.

Another New World of Music and Dance

Published: 2005-02-18 *WOMADelaide*

Murray Bramwell , Rodger Lee and David Sly preview recent releases from artists appearing at Womadelaide 2005

Now an annual fixture, Womadelaide comes round faster than Christmas. Hardly have we absorbed the sights, sounds and general bouquet of last year and we are presented with enticements for the next one. And, with the festival's emphasis on new and different programming, each year brings a fresh list of unfamiliar names and musical styles. Having acquired some grasp of tuva and son, Tropicalisimo and m'balax - and got to know the work of Baaba Maal, Youssou N' Dour, Salif Keita and a dozen others - we find each Womadelaide program is filled with new unknowns and we are back to the drawing board.

There are some notable returns this year, such as Yair Dalal and Zap Mama , and familiar US artists like Kronos Quartet and Richie Havens. But there are many more in the 2005 line-up that are entirely new. With only a few weeks before Botanic Park opens its gates for three more days and nights of magic music, here are some CDs to help get your ears tuned ...

Capercaillie Choice Language (Vertical/Sanctuary) Murray Bramwell

Scottish band Capercaillie brings the full Celtic lineup of pipes, whistles and fiddles, not to mention the golden vocals of Karen Matheson. Choice Language has the usual judicious mix of traditional ballad, new compositions, jigs, reels and Gaelic mystery. But, like other folk bands (I am thinking of the illustrious Clannad) they are drawn at their peril to that instrument of pop torture, the synthesiser. The majestic opening of the first track Mile Marbhaisg for instance, is too tricked up with high hat, synth fills and other effects. However, Matheson's vocals are so effortlessly melodic that they win the day. Flute and drum lively up The Old Crone and At Dawn of Day finds an appealing groove, while Little Do They Know and The Boy Who - new compositions from accordion player Donald Shaw - explore Nationalist politics and the plight of children on the West Bank. Capercaillie is more than the sum of the careful accomplishment of Choice Language though. Listen to the sheer zest of their 2002 Live album (Survival Records) and you'll be counting them as a Womad definite.

Jiir The Pigram Brothers (ArtsWA) Murray Bramwell

In songs like My Land, Broome based legends The Pigram Brothers capture what is idyllic about the North West Coast - "it's all in the life of a freshwater man." But elsewhere they also remind us of the hardships - "how many furlongs can we step in Johnny Walker's shoes." With lilting guitar, chiming mandolin, dulcimer and sprightly percussion, the Pigrams - clansmen and brothers Stephen, Alan, Philip, Gavin, Colin and David - have melded a sweet country sound which is light and lyrical. Other highlights on this CD include the instrumental Villaret, Riverman and the wry wordplay of Hill 22. With well-judged support from Adelaide producer, Kerryn Tolhurst, Jiir , named for a kind of sea eagle, is music for warm nights and clear skies. In the past Adelaide has missed out on The Pigram Brothers. Womad 2005 will remedy that oversight.

Boomerang Daara J (Wrasse Records) Murray Bramwell

Sengalese rappers Daara J, like Youssou N'Dour before them, bring the rhythmic spirit of Dakar to the snappy, high-sheen studios of Paris. Here is Hip Hop garnished with warm choruses, crisp percussion and Afro pop guitars. From the almost Latin beats of Boomerang to the café accordions and crunching percussion of Exodus, Daara J are an irresistible amalgam of world sounds. Performed in French and Sengalese Wolof dialect, the urgency of their lyrics is, unfortunately, often missed as they focus on the disillusionment of migration (Exodus) and spirals of crime (Babylone) The CD sleeve translations from Bopp sa Bopp read - "welcome to the land of loonies where hatred has become commonplace." Other highlights include Le Cycle, featuring the splendid vocalist Rokia Traore and the hypnotic repetitions of Le Precipice. Daara J is Hip Hop that is about more than ego and gangsta turf wars. As they say in Boomerang - "been born in Africa, growing up in America, rap has just gone around to come back." And all the better for it.

Ancestry in Progress Zap Mama (Luaka Bop) Murray Bramwell

Zap Mama, led by composer performer Marie Daulne, have delivered their first album in five years for David Byrne's New York based Luaka Bop label. Having morphed from a capella to a bright, high energy R n B sound, Zap Mama proclaims its own Sweet Melody in the cruisy opening track then switches to French for Vivre, a shoop shoop salsa number featuring Daulne's distinctively witchy vocals and intricately arranged girly choruses. Other guest vocalists appear - Erykah Badu on Bandy Bandy and Talib Kweli on Yelling Away (with additional raplines from Common.) Also intriguing is Miss Q'N a Daulne fairytale with a feminist twist. Ancestry in Progress finds Zap Mama reflective, assured and ready to party. Expect them to be a blast.

Radical Roots from the Emperor of African Reggae Alpha Blondy Murray Bramwell

These selections from Ivory Coast reggae star Alpha Blondy are drawn from a thirteen album career beginning in 1982. Inspired by Bob Marley and Peter Tosh Alpha Blondy (his name is not a hair colour, it is derived from the French word for bandit) and his regular band the Solar System are an example of yet another cultural circle - this time from Trenchtown, Jamaica back to West Africa. Classic tracks map the struggle for freedom in Africa - Apartheid is Nazism, Bloodshed in Africa and Coup d'Etat. Wari, a recent track has the added vocals of the Saian Supa Crew while God Bless Africa is complete with breezy UB40 harmonica signatures. Although performed in French the political themes of Alpha Blondy's music are clear enough in such titles as Sciences sans Conscience and Journalistes en Danger. And anyone familiar with Bob Marley's War will soon recognise Alpha Blondy's La Guerre. Womadelaide has run short in the past - this time it sounds like we are in for some Alpha Reggae.

Grace of the Sun Richie Havens (Evangeline Records) Murray Bramwell

He is hailed as a Woodstock legend and he even includes a stately cover version of the Joni Mitchell tribute to the 1969 hippie-fest on this album. But, always his own person, Richie Havens has never needed to trade on anything but his singular talent - and over numerous albums he has maintained his regal blend of grainy vocal and heavy-strummed acoustic guitar. Accompanied here by musicians Walter Parks, Christopher Cunningham, Badal Roy and others, Havens creates an acoustic tapestry of guitars, bazouki, sarod, sitar and percussion that is as accomplished as it is sublime. There are many of his own songs - including the excellent title track, the meditative We Both Know and the powerful closing ballad Pulling Up the Stone. And, as ever, there is a Dylan or Beatles cover. This time it is All Along the Watchtower. Performed with vigorous rhythms and Havens' expressive and authoritative vocal, a great song comes startlingly alive. Businessmen they drink my wine, plowmen dig my earth...

Nuevo Kronos Quartet (Nonesuch) Murray Bramwell

In Nuevo, the ever intrepid Kronos Quartet explore, with arrangements by Osvaldo Golijov, the uncharted territories of contemporary Mexican composition. The opening track El Sinaloense by Severiano Briseno is however, so daunting that even Mexican listeners on music websites have wondered with alarm whether that is what non-Hispanics think mariachi music sounds like. Almost parodically discordant, it sounds like Spike Jones and City Slickers. I am sure I will warm to it (and the Plankton Man re-mix at the end of the album) but probably not before my print deadline. Beyond this daunting portal, though, is an album of exceptional riches - from the lyrical slow waltz, Se Me Hizo Facil by Agustin Lara, to the playful Miniskirt by Juan Garcia Esquivel and Perfidia, a luscious and poignant piece of 1939 lounge Latin by Alberto Dominguez, complete with 78 rpm samples. Also dazzling in its colour and vibrancy is Sensemaya by Silvestre Revueltas, requiring just the kind of vigorous, driving playing style that is the time-honoured Kronos trademark. Let us hope Nuevo is amply represented in March.

"New World Order" The Adelaide Review, No.262, February 18, 2005, pp.23-5.

Fine-Tuning the Festivities

Published: 2005-03-18 *WOMADelaide*

Womadelaide 2005 Botanic Park

Murray Bramwell

2005 will probably be known as the Wet Womadelaide. But only because - apart from some passing morning showers in 1992 - the event has been long blessed with ideal weather. Not that the Friday night rains this year proved especially irksome, especially since most of us had umbrellas amongst our kit. And, as a reward for audience loyalty perhaps, the first evening also provided some of the best music of the weekend.

The Friday line-up, in many respects, was a snapshot of the festival itself. After the warmly received Kaurna Welcome, the Kronos Quartet took the stage with a selection - as violinist David Harrington wryly noted - that was performed at another rainy festival in 1969. It was of course the Jimi Hendrix Woodstock rendition of the Star Spangled Banner which the accomplished ensemble, who for twenty years have showcased new compositions from across the world, followed with works from India, Ethiopia, Mexico as well as a splendid suite from the soundtrack of Requiem for a Dream.

The kapa haka group, Te Matarae i Orehu, from Aotearoa New Zealand took Stage Two by storm with a martial display both ferocious and redolent with cultural pride. By contrast, Zap Mama, led by the vivacious Mary Daulne with a bevy of vocalists, played their delectable form of Afro-Cuban Paris pop with crowd pleasers such as Sweet Melody and Bandy Bandy. Then while the highly rated French unit, Lo'Jo played the mainstage , Jim Moray presented his Sweet England set of familiar folksongs - Early One Morning, Lord Bateman and the raggle taggle Gypsies - now served on a bed of beats, samples and processed guitar and topped with Moray's almost-boy-band-perfect vocal.

Through a curtain of rain Alpha Blondy from the Cote d'Ivoire, along with his ten piece Solar System, channelled the music and the spirit of early seventies Bob Marley. With guitar riffs borrowed straight from Bunny Wailer and the irrepressible Mr Blondy's commanding presence, Womad finally saw and heard reggae styles from the Golden Age of Toots, Lee Perry and Peter Tosh re-integrated into Blondy's African themes of struggle and self-determination. And, finally, near midnight, the sublime vocals of Ustad Rashid Khan and his musicians created an ambience of calm and introspection for the last of the soggy stalwarts, staying on for what Womad pioneers remember as the Nusrat hour.

If there is word that describes Womadelaide this year it is accessibility. In past years musicians such as Papa Wemba performed whole sets in French and African dialect with no hint of the themes and concerns reflected in their music. And while it is expected that World Music will be sung in all languages, the extent to which Zap Mama, Alpha Blondy, the brilliantly scampering hip hop group Daara J, the Maori kapa haka group, the gypsy inspired Les Yeux Noirs and the politically staunch Vusi Mahlasela translated their lyrics and spoke directly to audiences was admirable, drawing us closer to their artistry and the values inherent in their music.

Another kind of accessibility in Womad programming, of course, is to have more mainstream anglo material. This is true of American singer Richie Havens, who reprised his famous improvised Woodstock raga Freedom/ Motherless Child but also impressed with his excellent covers of Dylan songs plus selections from his recent CD By the Grace of the Sun. His easy manner and coffee house troubadour style readily proved he also has a place in the Womad mix. Less satisfying were Capercaillie, a Scottish band with strong credentials, who served a repetitive, over-jigged set which failed to match past Celtic outings from Shooglenifty, Kila and the Afro Celt Sound System.

Australian performers are now more apparent in the Womad format. Highlights this time - the melodious Pigram Brothers playing their sunny evocations of the saltwater life in Broome and Nadia Golski's 101 Candles Orkestra delighting the workshop crowd at Stage Six.

Which reminds us that Womadelaide is a house of many mansions. There is the high road that runs between Stages One and Two featuring high octane headliners like the hispanic big band Ozomantli and the extravagant drumming of Dulsori . And there is the low road that features such exquisite authentic miniatures as the Adel Salameh Trio and Vusi Mahlasela as well as those likeable locals, The Audreys.

Everyone has their own festival itinerary and their set of Womad moments - soaking up the sun, lazing under the trees, strolling the park greeting friends, schmoozing with Snuff Puppets, playing with the kids, and, this time, walking in the drizzling rain while flame installations courtesy of La Compaignie Carabosse defy the logic of fire and water. For these excursions, music is both background and foreground, and the park itself becomes the event. For some it is a rave, for others it verges on self-induced coma. Womadelaide is much more than the sum of its parts - it is three days of global music-making, certainly, but it is also a welcome chance to let the rest of the world go by.

"Finetuning the Festivities" The Adelaide Review, No.264, March 18, 2005, pp.23-4.

Formulating the Festival

Published: 2005-12-09 *Adelaide Festival*

Murray Bramwell talks with Brett Sheehy about preparations for the 2006 Adelaide Bank Festival of Arts

Asked how he is feeling, six weeks out from the launch of the 2006 Adelaide Bank Festival, and Brett Sheehy says he's thrilled. According to his general manager, Simon Bogle, in the first month of sales the Festival has broken a forty year box office record. Fifteen thousand tickets snapped up and one show already sold out.

Brett Sheehy is thrilled. But he is quietly, cautiously thrilled. He might be talking tickets but he doesn't have them on himself. Yes, he arrived at the launch at the International Airport in a buggy full of streamers but it's not what you would call his style. He brings impressive credentials to the Adelaide Festival director job – a decade at the Sydney Festival, including four as Chief Executive – but he prefers to wear them lightly.

Right from the start, the auguries for the 2006 Adelaide Bank Festival have been good. There have been no signs of bother, no snafus, no discouraging words. The Festival has had a bumpy ride so far this century – cost blow-outs, the Peter Sellars Experiment, and a troubling sense that the Melbourne Festival, particularly after three years with Robyn Archer, had nudged us on to the median strip. But, with a robust budget from a very committed Premier Mike Rann and a sharp and shiny brochure heralding an artfully constructed program of events, the 2006 Festival looks to change all that.

When I suggest to Sheehy that he has produced a particularly elegant schedule, he is all deflections – "It's partly instinct in curating a program but much of it is in the lap of the gods – the gods being the artists themselves. I have said frequently that I am not keen on theming festivals and imposing that kind of straitjacket on the visions of individual artists and companies. I'd much rather let it grow organically and be as surprised as the audience with what ends up."

"I certainly didn't set out two and a half years ago to explore issues of technology or the dissolving barriers between art forms, or to look at some of the great classical works through a contemporary lens. But as I moved about nationally and internationally that began to emerge. I'm fortunate to see dozens of international dance works, for instance, so how does one arrive at the Forsythe Company, Stau from the Netherlands and Random Dance from the UK ? That's where my job comes in – and my feeling of 'how new is this work ? how intelligent ? What is this work saying to us in 2006 and is it relevant and significant?' "

Brett Sheehy brings not only previous festival experience to this program but theatre credentials as well. As both a general manager and an artistic and literary associate, he worked as dramaturg on more than a dozen Sydney Theatre Company projects and he has particular thoughts about the place of theatre in a festival.

"It is still one of my loves but the theatre, both internationally and nationally, begins from a conservative springboard. Theatre hasn't really made it into the 21st century or even the cinematic age. I couldn't be less interested in a bunch of people in their living room on the stage – theatre needs to make a direct connection with the audience."

He immediately makes mention of Thomas Ostermeier, from the Berlin-based Schaubuhne Theatre and director of one of the festival highlights - Nora, a re-worked production of Ibsen's A Doll's House. "I've been lucky enough to see several of his works. He has certainly taken the theatre kicking and screaming into the cinematic age. Two hours later he releases you, emotionally and viscerally affected the way cinema does. You don't think - 'I have to prepare myself mentally for a piece of theatre.' I'd be thrilled if the legacy of this festival was an experience like that."

"Or William Forsythe's Three Atmospheric Studies. People call him a choreographer but he is really a theatre creator - I shied away from calling his production a dance work, I think I called it a movement and theatre work. He uses the invasion of Baghdad as a starting point to discus geopolitics and the darkness and horror of this century. My theatre background very much influences these choices. I look at any production – whether dance or operatic through a theatrical lens. I think of the Glyndebourne production of Jonathan Dove's Flight as a great piece of theatre, it also happens to be a wonderful opera."

A close watcher of Australian festivals over many years Sheehy has his eye on what he calls the festival canon. It is the business of festivals to introduce people who, in time, become the major figures in their art form. Adelaide has had many such experiences with Peter Brook, Pina Bausch, Robert Lepage, the Rustaveli Company of Georgia and many others. When I compare his festival with Christopher Hunt's quiet achievement in 1994, Sheehy characteristically deflects the praise but concedes that, like Hunt and Sheehy's mentor Anthony Steel, he sees it as the role of the festival director to bring to Australian audiences artists of lasting distinction. His Sydney Festival claims include Ariane Mnouchkine's Theatre du Soleil and Shen Wei Dance Arts. For Adelaide, he is justly proud to have secured the Schaubuhne Theatre, a Glyndebourne Festival opera and William Forsythe's newest company.

He might also mention David Byrne. Indicative of Brett Sheehy's low-key persistence – and the way the festival circuit works, Here Lies Love, David Byrne's collaboration with Fat Boy Slim on the subject of Imelda Marcos has had a slow gestation. Sheehy had been following the work of the former lead singer of the legendary New York band, Talking Heads, through the 1990s before scheduling him for the 2002 Sydney Festival (a show that also played here for a lucky few in the Entertainment Centre.) At that time Byrne signaled he was working on a song cycle about Marcos but it was never quite ready for the next two years of Sheehy's Sydney programs. "However, when the headhunter talked to me in Chicago about doing the Adelaide Festival ," Sheehy recalls, "the first person I emailed was David Byrne, saying – look, there's a vague chance I may be in Adelaide in 2006."

That has turned out to be much more than a vague chance and David Byrne and Brett Sheehy are now well into preparation for next March. When, on opening night, the church bells ring out from the two Adelaide cathedrals, they will herald the beginning of three weeks of festival. And what will the director be looking forward to in that time ?

"I don't want to sound ungrateful," he replies sheepishly, "but during the actual festival I don't feel a lot of pleasure. I am so nervous. I stand at the back of every auditorium, exhibition hall and gallery space, biting my nails, praying that the work connects. Sometimes I feel physically ill and I can hardly be in the room. If it does connect, of course, it is one of the great thrills in life."

And then, almost in spite of himself, he starts to talk enthusiastically about the opening night spectacular - Il Cielo che Danza (the Dancing Sky)an how much it will appeal to young audiences. For all his nail biting, it is clear that Brett Sheehy, also, can hardly wait for those bells to ring.

"Getting Brett's Best" The Adelaide Review, No.282, December 9, 2005. pp.18-19.

Sampling the World

Published: 2006-01-27 *WOMADelaide*

Womadelaide 2006

Murray Bramwell previews some recent CDs from this year's Womadelaide artists

With Womadelaide, these days, it is never very long between drinks. Hardly have we absorbed the pleasures of the three day festival and we are offered the blandishments of the next one. Since going annual two years ago this festival of world music and dance continues to surpass itself – which is no mean feat, given that it began, back in 1992, as an already top-notch event. This year is the tenth fixture and it is being promoted as the largest yet – 400 artists from twenty seven countries – with almost no repeats from previous years.

That means there is plenty to prepare for – if you are interested in the music, of course, and not just lolling about on the grassy sward and snoozing under the canopy of Moreton Bay figs in Botanic Park. Not, as they say, that there is anything wrong with that. But given that Womad audiences are notorious recidivists, we have accumulated over time a substantial awareness of the music of continental Africa, the ethnic communities of Europe, and the Pacific rim including the diversity of cultures here in Australia.

So now, with the full program announced, is a good time to sample some of the sounds that await us in March. First up, on the Friday night, after the Kaurna welcome, is the eminent Miriam Makeba, the first lady of South African music. From the 1950s onwards she has, like Harry Belafonte in the Caribbean, been an ambassador for her people's music and a proponent for their political rights. Those who may remember her only as part of the folk scene of the 1960s will be impressed by her new CD Reflections (Gallo Records) with its sharp arrangements and Makeba's suave vocals – exploring material ranging from Hugh Masekela to Van Morrison and the Manhattans.

Also on the first night is Cameroon singer Coco Mbassi whose second album, Sisea, is earnestly impressive. Opening with Bebotedi she pays tribute to the great singers who preceded her. Mahalia, Makeba - and Salif Keita, in whose band she provided vibrant, gospel-inflected vocals. Celtic music is a mainstay of Womad and Irish accordionist Sharon Shannon, as those who have seen her on previous club tours will already know, promises to be a knockout. Spellbound, her "best of" collection from Daisy Discs is a good place to start. Onstage at Womad, with the likes of Capercaille piper Michael McGoldrick, we can expect a lively set. 2006 also brings three other distinctive women, all of whom have CDs well worth listening to – Scottish percussionist Evelyn Glennie's inventive Shadow Behind the Iron Sun, the eclectic Paris-based Cape Verde vocalist, Lura, with her album Di Korpu Ku Alma and, from Iraq, Farida and her ensemble, performing traditional maqam songs..

The Australian contingent is especially strong this year with acts ranging from Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu's Saltwater Band, whose album Djarridjarri is available from Skinnyfish Records, to Paul Kelly, returning to Womad after ten years, with his bluegrass band, the Stormwater Boys. Their album, Foggy Highway, is a corker and includes re-recordings of Cities of Texas and Archie Roach's masterful ballad Rally Round the Drum. Also prominent on the bill are blues/ roots wizard Jeff Lang, whose gutsy album You Have to Dig Deep to Bury Daddy came out last year, and winsome indie singer, Clare Bowditch, with her band the Feeding Set, whose debut album Autumn Bone is terrific. Oz music veteran Joe Camilleri makes a Womad debut, teaming up with Nicky Bomba for a set based on their Limestone CD – a mix of soul, ska, reggae and British Beat.

And speaking of reggae, Womad 2006 announces for one show only – Jimmy Cliff, legend of Jamaican music and star of the cult film The Harder They Come. Many Rivers to Cross and Sitting in Limbo are among his many great songs. We can probably also expect selections from Black Magic his recent CD. Produced by former Eurythmic, Dave Stewart, and featuring guests Wyclef, Sting, Annie Lennox and the late Joe Strummer, it has topical references to 9/11 and the Middle East - but diehards might prefer the rougher-hewn Island sounds of his classic work.

Orchestra Baobab, who feature on both Saturday and Sunday nights, are a must. Re-formed after a twelve year hiatus this Senegalese outfit has close ties to the remarkable Youssou N'Dour and they exude much of the same energy and flair. Their CD, Specialist in All Styles (World Circuit) with its Cuban cadences, funk garnishes and rhythmic dazzle is among the best of this year's Womad crop. Also high energy and musically nimble is Brazillian Chico Cesar who is preceded on Friday night by the Dhol Foundation. Named for the double-tuned drum played by leader Johnny Kalsi, the Foundation is his "other band" when not working with the Afro Celt Sound System, the fusion outfit which astonished the first Womadelaide in 1992. Listen to the Dhol's excellent album, Drum-Believable (TDF Records).

Also at that first Womad was Indian classical violinist Dr L.Subramanian, presenting a peerless set that sent us all in pursuit of his recordings on Nimbus Records – Three Ragas for Solo Violin and Raga Hemavati both remain favourites of mine. His return, in collaboration with Amjad Ali Khan, will be a late night reverie we are also likely to cherish.

On sale also is Sounds of the Planet - Womadelaide 2006, a sampler of this year's artists released through Shock Records.

"Sampling the World" The Adelaide Review, No.284, January 27, 2006, p.20.

Combing the Fringe

Published: 2006-03-01 *Adelaide Fringe*

Murray Bramwell previews the 2006 Adelaide Fringe program.

It is hard to know just which part of the word “fringe’ still applies to the now enormous Adelaide Fringe. The name comes from the Edinburgh Festival and Fringe, which Adelaide so closely rivals and resembles and the idea is that the Fringe showcases the more radical, marginal and, shall we say, edgy artists and performances.

That is still a bit true, but also significantly not. The Adelaide Festival has never been without its controversies and on many occasions has offered the most challenging and provocative works – think Dumb Type, Forced Entertainment, Fura del Baus, La Carniceria Teatro and so on. Meanwhile the Fringe has itself become an institution, particularly with its mass appeal comedy, and for many (as you will also find in Edinburgh) is mistaken for the festival itself. This is hardly surprising given its sheer size and dominance – and this year it seems to be bigger than ever.

Whenever the Fringe is talked about – big statistics are sure to follow. In 2006 there will be 4000 artists, 1400 technicians, 500 acts and 6000 performances. That is a lot of action and in the Darwinian struggle for audiences some will surely come to grief at the box office. But, marvellously, the hazards of the bottom line are far from the minds of those intent on Putting on a Show. The energy and commitment of Fringe artists is unique - and the variety of events, large and small, brilliant and not so-crash hot, is arrayed in the recently announced program.

Approaching the program can be a daunting business for those not already hooked into events put on by friends or by comedians, theatre and cabaret acts with whom they are already familiar. That is true for all of us – we all look for the tried and true. But the Fringe is also a time to suss out the wildcards and the long-odds prospects. Director Karen Hatfield and her team have again done an excellent job with their huge task, so make the most of what is now on offer.

The theatre section is, once more, large and diverse and there is much to intrigue us. There is the usual overseas and interstate contingent with some new names and old friends as well. Arts Projects Australia has a program of events, many of them Edinburgh successes, in the Union Hall. Opening in the first weekend is South African company Fortune Cookie with The Travellers a show that is being compared to the 2002 APA success, 3 Dark Tales. Also, Guy Masterson, director last time of 12 Angry Men, returns with a solo presentation of Dylan Thomas’s poetic classic, Under Milk Wood. Elsewhere, at the Queens Theatre, UK performer Andrew Dawson will perform Absence and Presence and the highly rated Leicester Haymarket Theatre’s The Bogus Woman also opens. Theatre Simple from Seattle, Washington make a welcome return with 52 Pick Up and Wallace Shawn’s The Fever.

Other international acts which are bound to catch attention are Rainer Hersch channeling Victor Borge, the witty UK musicians, Pluck, the comedy Angry Young Man at Holden Street and a new work by Eve Ensler - The Good Body, featuring the excellent Leah Purcell. Interstate company Theatre in Decay will present two plays by Robert Reid – Eight Days and Empire and at Higher Ground (which promises to be a hot venue during the Fringe) Sydney company Parnassus’s Den will stage The Department Store.

In the local line-up are some welcome returns that deserve new audiences and revisits. Brink Productions’ 4:48 Psychosis, Sarah Kane’s brilliant and disturbing last testament, opens at the Queens, Floogle are re-staging Black Crow Lullabies at the Tea House gallery, Maiden’s Low Level Panic plays at the Bakehouse and Stephen House’s play Miss Blossom Callahann features at Jive. Then there is new stuff – Minister’s Children from Budgie Lung, Stir Theatre’s production of the lesser-known David Williamson play, A Conversation, and Astrid Pill’s Cake for Vitalstatistix. The Border Project is convening a Highway Rock’n’Roll Disaster at Higher Ground where the Pants will also appear. Other new works also include Fitting Rooms a new play by Jennifer Lusk presented by Binka Boo productions, Headlong Theatre are at Fowler’s Live and Unseen Theatre’s Dancing at Lughnasa opens at the Bakehouse.

The Fringe music program is also substantial, with an excellent program at the legendary Spiegeltent in Rundle Park featuring the illustrious Dave Graney and Clare Moore, Stephen Cummings, Colin Hay and UK group Fourplay. Richard Thompson’s single show at Norwood Concert Hall on March 6 is a must, as is English singer Jez Lowe at the Church of Trinity in Goodwood. Local favourites the Adelaide Chamber Singers perform by candlelight at the Cathedral and Eve will perform at the Bethlehem Lutheran.

Comedy has long been the staple of the Fringe and a large contingent of usual suspects will be in evidence. Top of the list for me is Rich Hall whose new show Levelland explores the mind of a Texas shock-jock. Arj Barker, Daniel Kitson, Maria Bamford and UK’s Stephen K Amos and Rhod Gilbert are all returning. Lano and Woodley, hysterical at the Fringe program launch, are presenting what they call their farewell show - which we can only hope is true in the Nelly Melba sense of the word. Dave Hughes, Fiona O’Loughlin, Judith Lucy and Adam Hills will perform as will Tripod, the terrific Eddy Perfect, the Umbilicals and Scared Weird Little Guys. The buzz will be out for the new names to watch – including up and coming local jokers. Much of the action will be at the Rhino Room, as well as the Nova – second home to Rod Quantock and Greg Fleet.

Commissioned by the Adelaide Review but not published.

Adelaide Fringe 06

Published: 2006-03-02 *Adelaide Fringe*

Murray Bramwell

The Bogus Woman By Kay Adshead Leicester Haymarket Theatre February 26. Tickets $8 - $20 Fringe Tix 8418 8666. Until March 10

4.48 Psychosis By Sarah Kane Brink Productions Queen's Theatre, Adelaide February 26, Tickets $18 - $24 Fringe Tix 8418 8666. Until March 12

Absence and Presence Devised by Andrew Dawson Queen's Theatre, Adelaide February 26. Tickets $18.50 - $26.50 Fringe Tix 8418 8666. Until March 4

Pluck Queen's Theatre, Adelaide February 26. Tickets $16 - $20. Fringe Tix 8418 8666. Until March 19 Riverside Theatre, Parramatta, Sydney Mar 30 – April 2 . Bookings 02 8839 3399

Borge Again Devised by Rainer Hersch Caos Café, Hindley St. February 25. Tickets $ 19.50 - $24 Fringe Tix 8418 8666. Until March 19

Second only to Edinburgh, the Adelaide Fringe just keeps getting bigger. This year's model has more than a hundred listings in theatre alone. The first weekend has begun strongly with the Leicester Haymarket production of Sally Adshead's The Bogus Woman. An asylum seeker at Heathrow airport, known only as the Young Black Woman describes her experiences as a journalist in an unnamed African country. Her daughter and other family members have been butchered before her eyes and she alone is spared. The circumstance is abstract but the details of Adshead's harrowing monologue - compellingly performed by Sarah Niles – are not. Based, in part, on reports from privatized detention centres in the UK, the woman's descent into institutional cruelty - and the extent to which she is disbelieved - is an uncomfortable truth for Australian audiences.

Another kind of lethal isolation is that of mental illness. Sarah Kane's 4.48 Psychosis, named for the dawning hour when, statistics tell us, more people die than any other time, is a play for voices describing mordantly, bitterly and, often poetically, her anguish. With audience close in on all sides, a capable quartet of actors scratch and prowl in a square of coarse sand. Although Kane's quarrel with herself and others is sometimes toxically narcissistic, director Geordie Brookman has navigated a problematic text with memorable flair.

Absence and Presence, devised by director, dancer and mime artist Andrew Dawson is auto-biographical in quite a different key. Describing his late father, a suburban English postman, Dawson explores the distance in the relationship, as his work as a performer takes him far from the pipe-and-slippers life of his widower parent. But re-reading old, unexpectedly tender and drily ironic letters brings new perspectives. There are echoes of Phillip Larkin in the lyric ordinariness of the father and with a haunting music score, elegant lighting and astute use of video, sculpture and movement, Dawson, thriftily and touchingly, shows how much the child is father of the man.

Classical music and comedy are not often found on the same stage or in the same sentence. Rainer Hersch's Borge Again, is a delightful excursion into the life of Victor Borge, the Danish comic who became a major success in the US in the late 50s and 60s. With forays at the keyboard and channeling Borge's deadpan, shaggy dog humour, the very likeable Mr Hersch is well worth a trip to Caos. And then there is Pluck, the zany English string trio who mix slapstick with some very proficient bowing and scraping. Don't miss their very special transcription of the Overture for 1812.

"Detention and Disbelief" The Australian, March 2, 2006. p.12.

Science, ethics and religion prove a winning mix

Published: 2006-03-02 *Adelaide Festival*

Murray Bramwell

Honk If You Are Jesus By Peter Goldsworthy and Martin Laud Gray State Theatre Company of South Australia Odeon Theatre, Adelaide. February 27. Tickets $45 - $55. Bookings BASS 131 246 Until March 18.

It is the business of writers to tell us what's in the wind, even before the shutters begin to rattle. But Peter Goldsworthy's 1992 novel, Honk If You Are Jesus, has turned out to be especially prescient.

Before Dolly the sheep, stem cell research and the rise to prominence of the religious right, Honk, with its lively wit and shrewd, sardonic comedy was sounding klaxons about science, ethics, God and the whole damned thing.

Now, adapted by Goldsworthy and director Martin Laud Gray, Honk is State Theatre's auspicious contribution to the 2006 Adelaide Bank Festival of Arts - and it is a splendid success.

To his credit Peter Goldsworthy has allowed the eminently readable texture of his novel to be distilled to its dramatic essentials. The plotline has been tightened, characters discarded and many funny lines sacrificed for the greater good.

And all the better to depict the battle of wits and wills between the Reverend Hollis Schultz, the evangelist patron of a finger-lickin' bible college on the Queensland Gold Coast and Dr Mara Fox, a world weary obstetrician with a speciality in IVF innovation. As Schultz says, he is man of the cloth who likes to cut his cloth to suit the occasion. He may be an Arkansas preacher but he and his wife Mary-Beth have a keen interest in the science of fertility and, with Nobel laureate and pioneer cloning expert, Bill Scanlon, also on the Schultz faculty, there are some Big Ideas afoot.

Laud Gray's production is given a titanium sheen as Mary Moore's clever set creates a cathedral of science complete with double helix pulpit and an imposing mandala of suspended test tubes. Stuart Day's Beyond Tomorrow music blips and bubbles and large circular screens monitor close encounters of the cervical kind. But it is the well-judged performances which make things come alive. Despite suffering a rehearsal injury and displaying a visibly swollen ankle, Caroline Mignone is excellent as the conflicted, but intellectually vibrant, Mara while Greg Stone is outstanding as Schultz. Like Michaela Cantwell as Mary- Beth, he resists caricature to provide an intriguing counter-balance to the ethical free fall represented by the technicians-for-hire, Scanlon and Tad (Justin Moore and Jonathan Mill.)

Perceptive, original and engrossing, Honk if You Are Jesus is destined for wide success. It is an entertainment brimming with intelligence: hallelujah, that's a combination worth cloning.

"Science, ethics and religion prove a winning mix" The Australian, March 2, 2006, p.12.

Double Dealing

Published: 2006-03-10 *Adelaide Festival*

Honk If You Are Jesus By Peter Goldsworthy and Martin Laud Gray

State Theatre Company Odeon Theatre

Murray Bramwell

There is something really fascinating about cloning. Not so much Dolly the sheep, after all, she was only one more of the same. But the idea of cloning something extinct – like a Tasmanian tiger. Or something unique, like a famous person...? That is where Peter Goldsworthy's intriguingly prophetic novel Honk If You Are Jesus comes in. Published in 1992, long before stem cell controversies and the renewed polarities between science and the religious right, Goldsworthy brought the possibility of IVF technologies - many of them pioneered by the late Dr John Kerin here in South Australia – and combined them into a speculative satire that reads like a mix of Aldous Huxley and David Lodge.

Now, in collaboration with director Martin Laud Gray, Peter Goldsworthy has adapted and up-dated Honk for the stage and the result is a resounding success. Dr Mara Fox is an obstetrician with an IVF specialty and she's tired of terminations. Making new connections – the old egg and sperm race – that is her thing, and when she is invited to a professorship at Schultz University, a bible college in Queensland with an unusual interest in advanced reproductive science, she bids goodbye to her mother's entreaties for husband and family and takes her colleague, harvesting wiz, Tad Romanowicz, with her.

For the stage of the Odeon Theatre, Mary Moore has created a set that merges the metallic sheen of the laboratory with the grandeur of a cathedral. Instead of a stained glass window is, what might be, a giant petri dish, surrounded by a tapestry of suspended test tubes. To the sides are two large circular screens displaying various internal fallopian procedures while, in front, stands a double helix pulpit from which the Reverend Hollis Schultz intones his majestic message of salvation and the Second Coming.

Goldsworthy's text has adapted well for the stage and he and the director have not only strengthened the dramatic essentials of the novel with admirable thrift, they have found room for an impressive amount of the Book of Genesis. And it all makes a rollicking story. Mara meets Bill Scanlon, a high powered American cloning expert, also hired by Hollis Schultz to implement, or shall we say resurrect, a very grand plan. At the same time Mary-Beth Schultz, wife of the ambitious Little Rock preacher, has more particular need of Mara's clinical expertise.

There are some excellent performances here. Caroline Mignone, on first night overcoming a very visible ankle injury, captures both the insecurity and ambition in Mara Fox, highlighting the strong binaries in the play about science and intervention on the one hand, and biological and divine destiny on the other.

Greg Stone's Hollis Schultz is a triumph. Stone is one of the best actors in the country and his measured, often hypnotic, performance – along with Michaela Cantwell's vividly imagined Mary-Beth - gives real dimension to the play's swirling arguments. Justin Moore is nicely nonchalant as Scanlon, confident in the inevitably of his powers, Cathy Adamek adds spin to Marilyn from PR and while Jonathan Mill's Tad is a good sport, he is also, we find, a skilled mercenary prepared to follow the laparoscope wherever it might lead.

With Stuart Day's tube-fizzling soundtrack, Justin McGuinness's video projections and Nic Mollison's rigorous lighting, Martin Laud Gray's production is strong in all departments. Honk If You Are Jesus is a rare thing, a comedy of ideas - and is surely destined to rise again after this present season. Adam Cook and State Theatre can be very pleased. Honk announces strongly as an all South Australian project within the Festival - and also has a certain future on the national stage.

The Adelaide Review, No.287, March 10, 2006. p.16.

Adelaide Festival 2006

Published: 2006-03-13 *Adelaide Festival*

Murray Bramwell

Here Lies Love – A Song Cycle Music by David Byrne and Fat Boy Slim

Ridley Centre, Royal Adelaide Showground March 11. Tickets $59 - $20. Bookings BASS 131 246 Until March 14.

By way of preface to Here Lies Love, David Byrne wonders how people can justify "their nastier behaviours to themselves" - but twenty four songs and a reprise later, we are still not any the wiser. Imelda Marcos is both an interesting subject and an unlikely one, and that is the potential appeal of Byrne's idiosyncratic project. He is proposing that Imelda is no more the sum of her shoes than Jackie Kennedy was just a collection of pillbox hats.

We get plenty of backstory – her origins in genteel poverty, her doting nanny Estrelle, her Scarlett O'Hara determination to get ahead in the world. She wins second prize in a beauty contest and declares herself the winner – rather like Ferdinand Marcos' rigged election. Ferdy courts her in eleven whirlwind days as, destined by fate, they become the King and Queen of Hearts. Imelda is kitsch and cruel, enterprising, and in her "handbag diplomacy" - visiting Gaddafi, Kissinger, and a string of US presidents - politically astute.

In a venue set up as part dance club, part conventional theatre, Byrne narrates Imelda's story in a series of off-the-cuff links between songs that are, at once, disarming, unfocused and time-consuming. A barrage of photo images unfolds on the large screen behind the concert stage where an excellent band, featuring percussion and keyboards, supports impressive vocalists Dana Diaz-Tutaan (Imelda) Ganda Suthivarakom (Estrella) and the impish Mr Byrne himself. The songs, while co-written with Fat Boy Slim, bear strong Byrne signatures – catchy tunes, punchy rhythms and animated vocals.

But there is little evidence of director Marianne Weems here. Is Byrne's casually consulted clipboard a rejection of the slick narrative connections that are the dreary convention of the usual cabaret biog, or evidence of a show underdone ? The abundance of new songs is a treat for David Byrne admirers – but many cover similar threads in Imelda's early life and her abandonment of the faithful Estrella, leaving us to make large inferences about the complicity of the American government in the Marcos story and no time to reflect on the downhill ride. There are intriguing ironies in David Byrne's approach to Imelda but we need more perspective and contrast. Here Lies Love is a likeable concert – full of good tunes and unfathomable ambiguities. It may yet be a terrific show, with perceptive themes and liberating anti-theatrical elements, but at the moment, the festival is hosting an uncertain work in progress.

"A steel butterfly still emerging" The Australian, March 13, 2006. p.16.

Desperate housewife transcends the ages

Published: 2006-03-13 *Adelaide Festival*

Murray Bramwell

Nora (Henrik Ibsen's A Doll's House) Schaubuhne am Lehniner Plaz, Berlin Her Majesty's Theatre, Adelaide March 11. Tickets $85 - $20. Bookings BASS 131 246 Until March 17.

It has been said that when Nora Helmer slams the door behind her in the final scene of Ibsen's A Doll's House, its echo could be heard for the rest of the nineteenth century. Thomas Ostermeier's inventive and incisive re-staging for Berlin's Schaubuhne company is proof that the play still resonates strongly more than 125 years later.

Unlike the usual stagings of Ibsen's work in period style, Jan Pappelbaum's design has Nora set in a Berlin unit, reminding us, with its contemporary trappings – as Ibsen did to his own audience - that we are looking at ourselves. Immediately, the characters lose their 19th century fustiness and take on unexpected familiarity. Torvald is an overworked bank exec, Krogstad, a middle management casualty, Kristine Linde is no longer a spinster, just unattached, and Rank, is young, debauched and wretched. Nora, too, is recognizable - as the trophy wife who is majoring in shopping.

There is so much to relish in this splendid production. The multilevelled set, dominated by a huge aquarium, is bathed in Erich Schneider's luxurious lighting as the actors perform with cinematic understatement, the surtitles actually rescuing them from an obligation to over-project. But this apparently seamless naturalism is periodically ruptured by Ostermeier's hypermanic bursts of strobe und punk. They don't always work, but the frenetic light-sabre dance that replaces Nora 's tarantella and ends with her dunked in the fish tank, has, like the grim slapstick of the drunk and dying Rank, a desperation and melancholy that is heart-breaking.

The performances are remarkable – Jorg Hartmann's Torvald is both bland and all-controlling, Kay Bartholomaus Schulze shows Krogstad the troll and the abject penitent, while Lars Eidinger's Rank, complete with costume angel wings, is a study in futile regret. Anne Tismer's Nora moves from penthouse pet to unfolding panic – with nothing to bargain with but her own body, she is disintegrating before our eyes, a desperate housewife for our time, every bit as much as Ibsen's.

Ostermeier raises the stakes with his new ending for the play but I am not sure that it is necessary. Having so brilliantly revealed the deep truths behind the life-lies in Ibsen's text, he shows us that even though a woman can now sign her own chequebook, it is not an end to the matter. Nora here, just as in 1879, leaves everything behind - husband, child, sanctioned identity. In this production, for the first time, we see her on the other side of that infamous door – and she sure isn't whistling Dixie.

"Desperate housewife transcends the ages" The Australian, March 13, 2006, p.16.

A steel butterfly still emerging

Published: 2006-03-13 *Adelaide Festival · Music*

Adelaide Festival

Here Lies Love – A Song Cycle

Music by David Byrne and Fat Boy Slim

Ridley Centre, Royal Adelaide Showground

March 11. Tickets $59 - $20. Bookings BASS 131 246

Until March 14, 2006.

Murray Bramwell

By way of preface to Here Lies Love, David Byrne wonders how people can justify "their nastier behaviours to themselves" - but twenty four songs and a reprise later, we are still not any the wiser. Imelda Marcos is both an interesting subject and an unlikely one, and that is the potential appeal of Byrne's idiosyncratic project. He is proposing that Imelda is no more the sum of her shoes than Jackie Kennedy was just a collection of pillbox hats.

We get plenty of backstory – her origins in genteel poverty, her doting nanny Estrelle, her Scarlett O'Hara determination to get ahead in the world. She wins second prize in a beauty contest and declares herself the winner – rather like Ferdinand Marcos' rigged election. Ferdy courts her in eleven whirlwind days as, destined by fate, they become the King and Queen of Hearts. Imelda is kitsch and cruel, enterprising, and in her "handbag diplomacy" - visiting Gaddafi, Kissinger, and a string of US presidents - politically astute.

In a venue set up as part dance club, part conventional theatre, Byrne narrates Imelda's story in a series of off-the-cuff links between songs that are, at once, disarming, unfocused and time-consuming. A barrage of photo images unfolds on the large screen behind the concert stage where an excellent band, featuring percussion and keyboards, supports impressive vocalists Dana Diaz-Tutaan (Imelda) Ganda Suthivarakom (Estrella) and the impish Mr Byrne himself. The songs, while co-written with Fat Boy Slim, bear strong Byrne signatures – catchy tunes, punchy rhythms and animated vocals.

But there is little evidence of director Marianne Weems here. Is Byrne's casually consulted clipboard a rejection of the slick narrative connections that are the dreary convention of the usual cabaret biog, or evidence of a show underdone ? The abundance of new songs is a treat for David Byrne admirers – but many cover similar threads in Imelda's early life and her abandonment of the faithful Estrella, leaving us to make large inferences about the complicity of the American government in the Marcos story and no time to reflect on the downhill ride. There are intriguing ironies in David Byrne's approach to Imelda but we need more perspective and contrast. Here Lies Love is a likeable concert – full of good tunes and unfathomable ambiguities. It may yet be a terrific show, with perceptive themes and liberating anti-theatrical elements, but at the moment, the festival is hosting an uncertain work in progress.

"A steel butterfly still emerging" *The Australian*, March 13, 2006. p.16.

Festive City in Full Flight

Published: 2006-03-20 *Adelaide Festival*

Murray Bramwell

From the moment of its program launch in the Cunard ambience of the brand new international terminal at Adelaide airport, the 2006 Adelaide Bank Festival has been looking to the skies. Director Brett Sheehy says he dislikes heavily themed festivals, but from the ornately decorated gas balloons of the opening event, Il Cielo Che Danza, to the centerpiece opera, Flight, the impression has been of things taking off.

And that included the ticket sales, which topped fifteen thousand in the first month, a forty year record. The Festival has been in need of such vital signs lately because it has had something of a bumpy ride so far this century. What with the disputed financial returns from Robyn Archer's excellent 2000 event, followed by the Peter Sellars Experiment in 2002, the festival under Stephen Page in 2004 was very much a recovery exercise. Fortunately, it worked well, enjoyed goodwill from audiences and established some steadying structure with the appointments of Simon Bogle as General Manager and Kate Gould in programming.

2006 has been a more ambitious event. From the time of his appointment, Brett Sheehy, a veteran of the Sydney Festival, made it clear that he knew what was required of him in Adelaide. Here was a festival that had, what marketers call, a brand to protect. Adelaide claims a reputation second only to Edinburgh and Avignon, and Sheehy had visited the Festival often enough over twenty years to know that wasn't just a parochial boast.

What is more, this year's Festival closed the same weekend that the Rann Government went triumphantly to the polls with what might be called a no-bread-plenty-of-circuses campaign which included the Festival, Fringe, Womadelaide, a new Autumn Adelaide Cup, and - just around the hairpin bend - the Clipsal 500. Mike Rann knows, as one who once served the Dunstan Renaissance, that South Australia has big tickets on itself culturally. It is Rann who underwrote the decision for Womad to play annually, a few weeks ago it was announced that the Fringe would also. The Festival will remain biennial, a good strategy, but government has tossed a generous amount of extra coin into its hat as well.

All of this political patronage has made the Festival a closely watched affair and Sheehy has performed well on the high wire. Whatever bugs might have turned up in the organisation have been genially and efficiently dealt with – in stark contrast to the spats, beat-ups and bunker mentality that have marked one or two festivals in recent memory. Like the silvery events brochure with its "Your Festival" geometric graphics, the Festival has been sharp and shiny - well-run, on task, fiscally responsible and announcing today box office returns of $3.9 million and attendances (including Womad) exceeding 625,000.

It is fine and dandy that targets have been met, and many behind the scenes will be mightily relieved – and justly pleased. But there is quite another kind of acquittal that a festival must make – and that is to answer the question "what has it given us ?" What has it been like to be in Adelaide in March ? Has 2006 been an ethereal excitement, or in its mix of crowd pleasers and current styles, a lightweight ?

The answer is that it has, at times, been both.

Not all of Brett Sheehy's high profile events have won over audiences. The Glyndebourne opera, Jonathan Dove's Flight, a recent work about a group grounded overnight in a passenger terminal, despite notable performances and a lusciously lit and impressive set, disappointed those expecting a contemporary work of the stature of, say, Jake Heggie's Dead Man Walking. Instead they got something closer to whimsical operetta.

Another major item, David Byrne's Here Lies Love, a song cycle based on the life of Imelda Marcos, despite the former Talking Head's affable presence, revealed itself as underdone and inconclusive. Such are the fortunes of a festival at times. Brett Sheehy's fostering of Byrne's project could well have triumphed - and may yet in its next incarnation in Robyn Archer's Liverpool Festival.

Other new works have excited audiences, however, and more than vindicated inclusion – Honk if You Are Jesus, Peter Goldsworthy's stage adaptation (with Martin Laud Gray) of his satiric novel about IVF and the cloning of a New Age, was a sell-out success for the State Theatre Company while Garry Stewart's latest for ADT, Devolution, has already been picked up for further festivals in the US and Europe.

The music program has been appealing and broad, spanning jazz and electronica from Pat Metheny and Talvin Singh to a vibrant rendition by the Australian Youth Orchestra of Mahler's Das Lied von der Erde. The performances from the Amsterdam Sinfonietta and the Rascher Saxophone Quartet, along with the Adelaide Symphony's final night Leningrad Symphony have considerably bolstered the music stocks in the festival. Elsewhere Womadelaide continues as a major event in its own right, bringing depth and diversity to the second weekend. The after hours club – the Persian Garden, also the location for the As Night Softly Falls program, has proven to be just the place to gently rock the Casbah, the large palms and wandering camels, adding an exotic touch to the mostly balmy nights.

Festivals are often remembered for their signal moments – those epiphanies that remind us of how imaginative and affecting performed art can be. In the past, in Adelaide, it has been the work of Robert Lepage, the Rustaveli Company, Frankfurt Ballett and David Gulpilil. In 2006, Nora, Thomas Ostermeier's adaptation of Ibsen's A Doll's House was splendid, less for its altered ending and strobe and punk tactics, but for the intelligence and wit of its reading of a play still challenging us from 1879. The other highlight has been The Forsythe Company's Three Atmospheric Studies, a work of startling originality which uses movement and text, processed sound and silence, to make us feel the value and meaning of the life - and death - of a mother's child.

These two events alone have a gravity and seriousness that adds substance and range to Sheehy's program. Ultimately, it has been an airy imagining, but not a festival lite. That much has seemed effortless in presentation but, also, on reflection, rewarding and provocative, is indication that, even in cynical times, Brett Sheehy has put wings under this Adelaide Festival. We look forward to where it will glide in 2008.

"Festive City in Full Flight" The Australian, March 20, 2006, p.19.

Days and Nights in the Forest

Published: 2006-03-24 *WOMADelaide*

Womadelaide 2006

Murray Bramwell

As the fourteenth Womadelaide has demonstrated, not even 37 degree heat on Saturday and steady rain on Sunday night can keep a good show down. This highly ritualized event even drew increased attendances this time around, claiming 75 000 attendances overall. This is a relief for those who wondered how Womad would continue to stack up against the ever-expanding Fringe, the Festival, and even the Crows' good run in the NAB Cup. But, we can also say -safely with hindsight !- that it is no surprise.

Womad is taking on its own inevitability – and has for some time now. The recidivist rate is very high, even with a hike in the admission price this year. Some have been every time since 1992, many have been to most. Young people who first came as little fry now return with their friends, the way it is also happening with Big Day Out. It is a tradition to go to Womad and, from the moment they step on to the cool green expanse of Botanic Park, everyone knows what to do.

Stages One and Two are where they are supposed to be, so are the food tents, the Coopers taps, Vic's CD shop, the market displays, Angus Watt's flags and the ever-popular Kidzone and Healing Village. This year – yikes ! - an innovation, the Speakers Corner stage, an excellent new quiet performance space which like the Zoo and Moreton Bay locations are opportunities for those unexpected acoustic treats.

The program this year was drum heavy and highlighted Australian musicians for the first time in a while. For many the Dhol Foundation, led by the supercool Johnny Kalsi in his black turban and Raybans was a high, as were the irrepressible Renegades Steel Orchestra from Trinidad. The mix of traditional and fusion, rock idioms and electronica were well managed.

On Friday night Miriam Makeba, now a senior diva on the World stage, presented a stylish but politically understated set, while Paul Kelly and his bluegrass Stormwater Boys excelled with a bright, well-chosen set which included Kelly faves like To Her Door and Our Sunshine with less performed material like Little Kings and a reinvigorated Rally Round the Drum. Aussie roots guitarist Jeff Lang and his fine band played a strong set on the Sunday with some tasty garnishes from Lucky Oceans on pedal steel. Also notable at StageThree was Joe Camilleri and Nicky Bomba with their Limestone bluebeat songs.

Irish accordionist extraordinaire Sharon Shannon strongly represented the Celtic constituency and Brazilian singer, Chico Cesar, with his straw boater and high tech perspex guitar was a highlight at the Zoo stage. The African bands were more low key this year – Lura from Cape Verde played sweet Paris-influenced pop, Kanda Bongo Man was pleasingly rock steady with his Congolese band and Orchestra Baobab, led by the highly accomplished guitarist, Barthelemy Attisso, played a marvelous fusion of Cuban son and Senegalese swing. Their set on Sunday night rivalled that of headliner Jimmy Cliff who nonetheless galvanized the drenched crowd with his reggae hits You Can Get It If You're Really Want and a soulful reading of Many Rivers to Cross as well as singalongs of Cat Stevens' Wild World and anthems for peace love and understanding. No rasta rascal songs here – it is the softer we come with Jimmy these days.

There are a multitude of Womads each year- our pathways and songlines different according to age, curiosity and inclination. Many sat back and let the music float by, others moved in close for the mosh. Two highlights I am left with were meditative recitals – Farida, on the Sunday just before the rain set in, singing a series of Iraqi Maqam chants of great beauty and poise, the other, last thing on Friday night – the Nusrat hour, for those who remember the first ever Womad – classical violinist Dr L Subramaniam, playing a set of "short" ragas which redefined the word sublime.

"Days and Nights in the Forest" The Adelaide Review, No.288, March 24, 2006, p.13.

In the Fringe

Published: 2006-03-24 *Adelaide Fringe*

Murray Bramwell

In the profusion of the Fringe program has been a music program variously including Dave Graney, Shooglenifty, Monique Brumby and others, but the standout has to be Richard Thompson at the Norwood Concert Hall. From his days in Fairport Convention and through his distinguished solo career, Thompson has long been the guitarists' guitarist and the composers' composer. His show is a mix of songs ancient and modern – the plaintive Crazy Man Michael, the high revving 1952 Vincent and, from the new CD, Front Parlour Ballads, Let it Blow.

Thompson's guitar playing is astonishing – like he has seven fingers on his right hand, his thumb running basslines while he fingerpicks like a bluegrass band. It is a night of bright lights – the crowd sings Crawl Back and Thompson, with his vibrant tenor, sings Dimming of the Day.

The Fringe theatre has been full of surprises in the final week. The Irish play Trad, by Mark Doherty, features Frankie McCafferty and Peter Gowen as Da and Thomas – one as old as Methuselah, the other his 100 year old son. A droll reflection on Irish family and traditions – Trad's comedy is part Beckett, part Father Ted. McCafferty's Da clings to the mythology of history while his ancient son tries to humour his moods. Strikingly staged, with a sparing use of live music, Trad takes a powerful stare at the Ireland Joyce once described as the sow that eats her farrow.

White Men with Weapons also investigates a society undergoing change. Greig Coetzee describes his stint in the South African Defence Force at the time of FW de Klerk's détente and Mandela's release. It is sharply written and powerfully performed. Coetzee's squad of characters – recruits, boot camp NCO's, a dithery chaplain and a politically cynical CO – capture the ironies of a defence force trained against an insurgency that is becoming the new government. Weaving from English to Afrikaans, his performance is crisp, funny and, in its revelations of endemic racism, chillingly psychopathic. This is exceptional theatre, memorably performed.

Been so Long, presented by Melbourne company, three legs in a quadrella, has played in the Bunka bar at the Austral Hotel. Its setting is a pub, a "Losers bar" where Young Gil (Evan Jureidini) is looking for revenge against local spiv and charmer Raymond Legendre (Nathan Page) while local chicks Simone and Yvonne (Hannah Morris and Diana Miltins) are out for a fella and some laughs. UK playwright , Che Walker's Camden setting highlights a poetic London patois and director Syd Brisbane steers this smartly imagined production through some stylish moves. The cast is great – Hannah Morris excellent as the heartsick Simone and Brendon Rock, the barkeep, cool as a martini in a schooner glass.

"The Fringe" The Adelaide Review, No.288, March 24, 2006. p.16

Fringe Notes

Published: 2006-03-24 *Adelaide Fringe*

Murray Bramwell

Whenever the Fringe is talked about – big statistics are sure to follow. In 2006 there are 4000 artists, 1400 technicians, 500 acts and 6000 performances. That is a lot of action - and in the Darwinian struggle for audiences some already will have come to grief at the box office.

In theatre, where more than a hundred items are listed, Adelaide is seeing a quantum increase in activity and, already, a great deal that is engaging and high calibre. There are shows turning up wherever two or three can be gathered together, and some venues – Queens Theatre, Union Hall, the Fringe Club at Higher Ground, Holden Street and the Bakehouse – are hubs of enterprise. Many local productions have short seasons supported by dedicated posses of friends and family, while interstate and international shows must compete first for visibility and then for audiences.

Among the strong contenders in the first week is Andrew Dawson's Absence and Presence, an elegantly staged solo mime and video portrait of his relationship with his father, an English suburban postman, which deftly captures a life lived in habit, contemplation – and, the artist later realizes when he returns to the postman's own letters - one of insight and affection also. The Bogus Woman, Kay Adshead's compelling portrait of an African asylum seeker falling into the indifferent world of the UK detention centres, features a strong performance from Sarah Niles and has much to say to the land of Baxter and Villawood.

Also at the Queens is Brink Productions' reprise of 4.48 Psychosis – Sarah Kane's play for voices on the subject of love, anguish, therapy and suicide. Director Geordie Brookman keeps his four actors cornered on a square of sand . Notorious, because she took her life soon after writing it, Kane's play, is problematic, but has mordant wit, articulate anger and febrile poetry – Brink does well to capture these contesting struggles.

Women's perspectives are also to the fore in local company, Maiden's staging of Clare McIntyre's Low Level Panic. Thoughtfully directed by Rachel Paterson, it is a study of faltering self esteem as three young women confront their emotions and the often predatory fantasies of others. The Good Body, a new work from vagina monologist Eva Ensler, is also about self perception, weight gain and the tyrannies of beauty for women. Leah Purcell gives a vivacious performance with the Botox speech clearly an audience highlight.

Cabaret is in good order this Fringe. Borge Again, Rainer Hersch's witty tribute to Victor Borge is a must. Pluck, the zany string trio is fun, and Eddie Perfect continues to amaze.

The Adelaide Review, No.288, March 24, 2006. p14.

Festival Theatre

Published: 2006-03-24 *Adelaide Festival*

Here Lies Love David Byrne Ridley Centre

The Three Furies By Stephen Sewell Dunstan Playhouse

Macbeth By William Shakespeare Scott Theatre

David Byrne is just the sort of person you want in a Festival. Since fronting the innovative, late 70s band Talking Heads, his singular career has continued to thrive with a fascinating array of projects - and his world premiere of Here Lies Love, a song cycle based on the life of Imelda Marcos, written in collaboration with Fat Boy Slim, promised much.

And it delivers some. For a start, Byrne himself performs and narrates (complete with photo images) the Imelda story – rising from prom queen to wife of Ferdinand Marcos, the notoriously corrupt President of the Philippines. In a part club, part theatre setting, Byrne heads up a slick band of keyboards and percussion while his two talented lead singers – Dana Diaz-Tutaan as Imelda and Ganda Suthivarakom as the faithful servant, Estrella - belt out several dozen new and well-wrought compositions. There are few signs of Fat Boy Slim, but plenty of David Byrne's tuneful, upbeat rhythms. Despite his affable style, though, the show's narrative – and narration - is loose, equivocal and unfinished. Here Lies Love is still under construction and its direction not yet clear. It may yet be the hit of the Liverpool Festival, but Adelaide has seen only a project development.

Three Furies is also a biography – of the UK painter Francis Bacon and his model and lover, George Hyde. Augmented by songs written by Basil Hogios and sung by Paul Kapsis, it explores the abusive, alcoholic love/hate relationship between a painter who sees the world as meat and a young man too violated to be anything but unfair game. Stephen Sewell's text ramps up the melodrama and Jim Sharman's direction serves only to amplify it. With strips of neon along the stage, three doors waiting to become a triptych, and an onstage trio led by the composer, Three Furies is played like hellish cabaret.

But despite Paul Capsis' best efforts with repetitious lines, and ghastly settings of William Blake's The Rose – the mawkish music undercuts the dramatic gain. Simon Burke is valiant, but miscast, as the Painter. Playing him as seedy matinee idol rather than conflicted introvert, he turns Bacon into ham while Socratis Otto's Cockney Model is reduced to proletarian caricature, Burke's performance (and Sewell's text) emphasises the cruelty towards Hyde, but ultimately the play gives us scant reason to care. This production is full of sound and Furies, but signifies far less than it could.

A one person Macbeth ? What is this – economic rationalism gone completely mad ? In fact, Stephen Dillane, astutely directed by Travis Preston, turns the Scottish play into an epic poem. It is a startling performance, fluent, restrained and full of intelligent surprises. Lady Macbeth is young, foxy and French, Malcolm has an upper class stammer, Macduff is reduced to stony silence at the death of the innocents. Performing on blackening iron sand with a trio of musicians who provide sounds of almost subliminal virtuosity, Dillane reveals in the play its harsh wit and haunting futility.

Published as "Scottish Play Burns Intelligence", The Adelaide Review, No.288, 24 March, 2006, p.14.

Harmonising the World

Published: 2007-03-13 *WOMADelaide*

Womadelaide Sounds of the Planet 2007 March 9 -11. Botanic Park, Adelaide.

Murray Bramwell

Womadelaide has celebrated its fifteenth birthday in high style. With record attendances and nudging the crowd capacity of twenty thousand on Saturday night, it is still, along with Big Day Out, Adelaide's favourite music event. But unlike BDO, which sweats it out at the Wayville Showgrounds, Womad's access to the splendid green sward of Botanic Park makes it especially favoured. If it hadn't been for that fire ban in Belair National Park that necessitated the last minute shift to the CBD back in 1992, who knows where Womad would be now. Developed with all the resources of the Adelaide Festival by director Rob Brookman, Womad in the Botanic Park has remained high calibre– the music, the production values, and the range and quality of the amenities. For everyone who buys a ticket, it is a first class ride.

The ample variety of food and drink stalls, the Green-friendly house rules and strolling attractions, all make the whole site a lively, safe and orderly pleasure zone. Womad is for the music, but it is also a three day exeat from the world of work. For many it is a chance to be with friends or sleep under a tree. And where else can you write your mobile phone number on your child and let it roam the park with chums the way kids should be able to ?

The music program in 2007 is especially strong and well balanced. As always, there is the mix of high energy main stages and contemplative recitals under the Moreton Bay figs and by the zoo. Equally, the organizers have incorporated more for that younger audience who first attended with their parents and are now here in their own right - to see Lior, San Lazaro, Fat Freddie's Drop, Augie March and late night DJs Mad Professor and Mr Scruff. The influence of electronica and house music has been evident since the Afro Celt Sound System first blasted Womad in 1997 and the event has promoted new sounds and mixes since then. This time, the Gotan Project, under dubmeister Philippe Cohen-Solal, delighted fans (and slightly peeved purists) with its snazzy version, in ice-cream white, of techno-tango in Paris.

This has been a Womad for women artists. The Mahotella Queens remain a steadfast trio of strong J-berg ladies, performing with unquenchable energy after forty years. Lila Downs, from Oaxaca, Mexico via California brings an exciting and chic edge to Hispanic music. With her weaving dance and colourful eclectic costume, we are reminded that she came to prominence with the soundtrack to Frida. With a snappy band, including Paul Cohen on clarinet and Celso Durate on harp and violin, Lila Downs sang marvelous songs of Mexican iguana mysticism and melancholy ballads from the old cantinas. Also pleasingly doleful was the Portuguese fado interpreter Mariza. Suave in black with her urchin blonde hair, she sang her sad and histrionic songs of loss (and even more loss) to the evident pleasure of the large Saturday night crowd.

But more memorable was Yasmin Levy singing ladino songs, Judeo Spanish music from the fifteenth century. Her captivating twilight set on Sunday which explained, translated and greatly entertained was a highlight. Also on Sunday Bollywood legend, Asha Bhosle's performance with the Kronos Quartet and Chinese pipa (lute) player Wu Man was a delight. Reviving songs by her late husband R D Burman, Ms Bhosle sang from her CD You've Stolen My Heart – and the huge attentive crowd agreed.

The Australian contingent brought many fine moments – the exemplary Kev Carmody singing From Little Things Big Things Grow with the marvelous Waifs, The Mornington Islanders and new artists, Nganampa Music from the APY lands at the workshops, Augie March singing from the Moo Choir songsheet and the Backsliders, brilliant with the blues.

The headliners also delivered. Femi Kuti's band, an engine of horn players, tailfeather-shaking dancers and loud afrobeat sang about the Fight to Win and sampled the Eurythmics along the way, while Malian legend Salif Keita, with his fine-grained soaring voice led a fast-pitched band that had the groundlings gasping from dance fatigue. With only one performance Salif Keita had little time for his more contemplative material - and the lack of translation is unfortunate. It's like hearing Leonard Cohen in Bambara dialect. That is the problem when the global village becomes clubland. But, quibbles aside, this Womad has been another great success with marvelous music, brilliant sound and the most congenial crowd you could imagine. With the burred throat sounds of the Tuvan singers, Huun-Huur Tu, in our ears, another magical Womadelaide has passed. And it is the Artistic Director's last. Thanks Rob Brookman, for all the fish.

"Dancing to the rhythm of a global heartbeat" The Australian, March 13, 2007, p.12.

Numbers down but stellar performances

Published: 2007-03-16 *Adelaide Fringe*

March 15

Adelaide Theatre Adelaide Fringe 07

Fern Hill and Other Dylan Thomas Performed by Guy Masterson Tickets $20 -25.

What I Heard About Iraq By Simon Levy Holden Street Theatres' Directors' Choice 07

Holden Street Theatres, Hindmarsh Tickets $17 -23. Until March 31

Tom Crean –Antarctic Explorer Written and performed by Aidan Dooley Bakehouse Theatre until March 23 Tickets$20 - $22.

Rubeville The Black Lung Theatre until March 24 Kissy Kissy The Black Lung Theatre 145 Hindley Street Until March 16 Tickets: all $ 14 Bookings at Fringetix. Ph.8418 8666

Murray Bramwell

A week into the Fringe festival, all the vital signs are good – long, cheerfully patient queues for stand-up comics, busy city cafes and bars, and at Rundle Park, aka The Garden Of Unearthly Delights is bopping with music, freaks and carny shows. With just over fifty listings, the theatre program is only about half the size of the 2006 Fringe and there have been some late scratchings as well. Many scheduled are school and amateur productions – and one person shows, as though too many years of economic rationalism have reduced the performing arts to individual contractors. But there are also exceptional offerings to be found.

UK director and performer Guy Masterson, returning with Under Milk Wood, has added another Dylan Thomas vehicle, based around Fern Hill, the Welsh poet's finely wrought hymn to childhood. Masterson chooses well. There is the Auden-like political poem, The Hand that Signed the Paper, and the rages against mortality - the rambunctious Lament and Do Not Go Gentle into that Good Night.

But it is the prose works, written and performed by Thomas as BBC radio broadcasts, which provide the ballast. Masterson is good on the lilting Welsh, as his wicked impersonations of Richard Burton and Anthony Hopkins attest, but he wisely understates the rolling vowels with the gently funny A Visit to Grandpa's and A Child's Christmas in Wales, spared the author's own excesses, is revealed anew as a monologue of distinction.

Few have ever heard of Tom Crean, the Antarctic Explorer, which is why actor and writer Aidan Dooley's first rate show about the Irish lad who found himself in pioneering expeditions led by both Scott and Shackleton, is such a revelation. Dressed in authentic looking period polar gear, Dooley recounts exploits of danger and endurance that almost defy belief.

But this splendidly crafted script is all nuance and subtext. Rather than a ripping yarn of Empire, it looks beneath the legend. Aidan Dooley, with a disarmingly direct performance which never misses a beat, describes those quiet forms of courage that are most eloquent. You will go to the end of the earth to find theatre this rewarding

The facts also matter in What I Heard About Iraq, written by Simon Levy and based on an article by Eliot Weinberger. The Holden Street Theatre complex has been a hub for the Fringe again this year and owner Martha Lott directs this production featuring five actors, video screens and a ton of information. Taking a leaf from the Living Newspaper of the Thirties, this is the theatre that tells us not only the news fit to print, but takes from journals of record. It is a chronology of events in Iraq from the first Gulf War to the day of performance. Each actor begins "I heard.." and proceeds to quote politicians, commentators and everyday citizens caught in the chaos. There are droll impersonations and grimly funny ironies but the strong effect of all these hearsays is to remind us that the real enemy of spin is sequential thought.

The Black Lung Theatre working in a derelict shopfront next to a strip club in Adelaide's Hindley Street is a Melbourne collective producing a self-devised season including the nasty-noir Rubeville, Thomas Henning's deconstructed tale of pros and cons, and Kissy Kissy, directed by Daniel Koerner and featuring Mark Winter and Sarah-Jane St Clair, which describes the go to woe of a love affair with comedy, karaoke, banality and a freshness which is attracting full houses and reminding us that companies like Black Lung breathe new life into the Fringe with theatre this rough and this ready.

"Numbers down but stellar performances" The Australian, March 16, 2007, p.14.

Fringe Theatre

Published: 2007-03-16 *Adelaide Fringe*

What I Heard About Iraq By Simon Levy Holden Street Theatres' Directors' Choice 07

George Orwell's Animal Farm Adapted by Guy Masterson Performed by Gary Shelford

Fern Hill and Other Dylan Thomas Performed by Guy Masterson

Holden Street Theatres Until March 31

Tom Crean –Antarctic Explorer Written and performed by Aidan Dooley Bakehouse Theatre until March 23

Murray Bramwell

Holden Street is again one of the strongholds of Fringe theatre this year and the manager of the complex, Martha Lott, is also making her debut in the Director's Choice season with Simon Levy's play What I Heard about Iraq. Perhaps it is because so many aspects of the Iraq war have left us speechless, it has not often been a subject for film makers - and playwrights even less so. Interestingly, like David Hare's Stuff Happens, Simon Levy, basing his text on an essay by Eliot Weinberger, stays close to documentary detail. As they say in Dragnet, it is the facts, ma'am.

Martha Lott has created a simple tableau for the five performers seated on video monitors in front of a projection screen with a collage of newspaper headlines spread along the stage floor. Levy's play is a chronology of public statements – all taken from press sources and Lott's production intercuts archival news vision also. Each actor begins "I heard that …" and proceeds with statements from politicians, the military, journalists and the wretched citizens in the middle of this catastrophe.

Actors Renato Musolino, Nicholas Ely, Nathan Porteus, Jada Alberts and Tamara Lee present this often grimly funny narrative with witty impersonations of Bush, Blair and Howard. But the overall effect is compelling, reminding us, literally, of the order of things – and how disorderly and mischievous the telling and remembering of such recent history has been.

Also at Holden Street are some familiar UK performers returning with new shows. Guy Masterson, remembered for his Under Milk Wood has added a further Dylan Thomas vehicle, Fern Hill. Thomas's splendid lyrical poem of childhood and death is the centerpiece of a daisy chain of lesser known Thomas pieces. The political poem The Hand that Signed the Paper and the finely observed Hunchback in the Park are admirable inclusions as are the deightfully comic radio pieces .The Dylan Thomas favourite, A Child's Christmas in Wales – well-known from the writer's own recordings –is performed with direct and understated humour by Masterson. By wisely avoiding the baroque theatrics of the writer himself, he reveals the work for the masterpiece it still is.

George Orwell's Animal Farm, that parable of the corrupt cycle of power based, rather pointedly, on the Bolshevik Revolution, is given an energetic presentation by Gary Shelford but Guy Masterson's adaptation is overlong. The tale still has more than two legs in these times of political chicanery but Shelford, proficient though he is with all the voices, is bogged down in exposition. Strategically trimmed by forty minutes, however, and this show would be more equal than most others.

The fact that we have never heard of Tom Crean is the point of Aidan Dooley's beautifully crafted monologue on the young Irishman who joined the Royal Navy at fifteen and found himself at the end of the earth on Antarctic expeditions with Scott and Shackleton. His is an amazing story, told with engaging flair and shrewd detail. Aidan Dooley, wearing authentic looking kit, on a set comprising a tarp and upturned sled, brings to life a remarkable man whose wry observations tell us much about class and the Empire, but also about human constancy and that quiet courage which is the most admirable . This is outstanding theatre, do not miss it.

"Fringe Review" The Adelaide Review, No.312, March 16, 2007, p.21.

Global Songlines

Published: 2007-03-20 *WOMADelaide*

Womadelaide : Sounds of the Planet 2007 March 9 -11.

Murray Bramwell samples some recent CDs from this year's Womadelaide artists.

It is now only a week away. Well established in its annual cycle, Womadelaide, follows the seasons back into the Adelaide autumn. And, after such a parched summer, the cool green expanse and easy shade of Botanic Park seems more beguiling than ever. This year's is the eleventh event and marks the fifteenth anniversary of this "world of music and dance" which formed such a memorable centrepiece to the Adelaide Festival back in 1992.

Womad continues to hit highpoints. Going annual has not affected the depth and range, or the sheer scale of the event. The program last year, for instance, was the largest yet, and this time around – with 330 artists from 20 countries - the quality and diversity of the scheduling is everywhere apparent.

The list of names and musical styles is as varied and esoteric as before. Each year we are presented with unfamiliar traditions and musical forms which are startlingly intact, and expanding hybrids which remind us that, in the global community of musicians, things not only continue to change, but are accelerated by events such as Womad itself. The many long-term Womad fans, those recidivists and their families who return to the event year after year, will have noted the ongoing shifts in style and emphasis in the event – including the rise of electronica and hip-hop, the expansion of Hispanic forms, the new wave of young indigenous performers, and the mellowing of artists as their careers mature.

In 2007 there are some particularly notable inclusions – not least the large and impressive Australian contingent. We are not a world in ourselves, heaven forbid, but the variety of music generated on our continent is a reminder that, whether or not the word is politically convenient, multicultural threads are rich and strong. Prominent among the participants is Kev Carmody (currently the focus of a tribute CD project organized by Paul Kelly) whose recent album, Mirrors, features a mix of straight-up political protest and fine ballads. Fans of the Stiff Gins will welcome the return of Emma Donovan with her own band and a new album - Changes. Blues will get a real burst with the excellent Backsliders (with added member, Oils-man Rob Hirst) Their Live CD (Shock Records) of two years back is a blast from Smokestack Lightning to Jug Band Blues. Sweet Baby James, with veteran percussionist Rob Eyers, will also win fans with his nimble slide versions of blues classics alongside strong originals.

Womad has more recently steered away from Aussie rock music – Crowded House and The Cruel Sea now being faraway memories. The inclusion of introverted popsters, Augie March is a welcome change of tune,Their recent CD Moo You Bloody Choir, featuring the melodic single One Crowded Hour, will be familiar to many, but new to older Womad fans who will no doubt warm to their literate and distinctive repertoire. The Waifs, with their lively mash of blues, pop and country rock will make a much-anticipated return. Their indie CD Shelter Me suggests they are in better form than ever. And Deborah Conway, with musical partner Willie Zygier, is a terrific addition to the Womad list. With her Broad concert projects (in cahoots with women singers such as Claire Bowditch, Ruby Hunter and Ella Hooper) and the Summertime CD of a couple of years back Conway, one of this country's smartest female vocalists, is a Sunday night must.

There is an especially strong contingent of women at Womad this time. Yasmin Levy's revival of Ladino, a 15th century Judeo-Spanish vocal form, can be heard on La Juderia , a haunting set which returns Ladino to its Andulusian roots and combines it with flamenco. Mariza, who precedes Levy on Saturday night, brings the sweet melancholy of Portuguese Fado back to the park. Her award winning CD, Fado en Mim, is released on the World Connection label. Another exciting prospect is Lila Downs, whose Mexican-American heritage brings together old strains and hot club sounds on La Cantina, an album well worth checking out.

Last year the estimable Miriam Makeba made a majestic appearance. This year South Africa's Mahotella Queens return after fourteen years. Their 2005 CD, Kazet, indicates they are as joyously vibrant as ever. And, on the final night, expect an extraordinary performance from the Indian singer, and Bollywood legend, Asha Bhostle accompanied by the mercurial Kronos Quartet and one expects, a bundle of beats and dubs to thicken the brew. You've Stolen My Heart, songs by R.D. Burman is available on Nonesuch Records.

Each Womad we have the chance to hear truly out-of-this-world, world music and this year the Tuvan throat singing sounds of Huun-Huur-Tu, a quartet from Southern Siberia will amaze, as will Etran Finatawa, a group of Tuareg and Wodaabe Saharan nomads, who combine their separate native styles and add a healthy dose of Bo Diddley to the proceedings. Griot singer, Habib Koite from Mali, is also not to be missed.

On a more ethereal note is Chinese flautist Guo Yue, once of the Guo Brothers, with his recent musical (and literary) memoir of life in the Cultural Revolution, Music, Food and Love (RealWorld) and Shivkumar Sharma and Rahul Sharma, exponents of the hundred string santoor, scheduled for the late Friday meditative spot - the Nusrat midnight hour. For the young and restless, prominent UK club personalities Mr Scruff and the Mad Professor will turn their tables and hybrid outfit The Gotan Project (check the tango anagram) will sashay with Argentinian moves and French dub FX.

Womadelaide, naturally, needs true headliners and this year there are several. Nigerian Femi Kuti and his sax-heavy band The Positive Force will raise the pulse and consciousness, and the pale prince from Mali, Salif Keita, perhaps the greatest of all the West African bandleaders we have seen, returns for one show only. His latest CD M'Bemba translates as 'grandfather' and his themes return to the domestic verities. It is beautifully sung and performed. As his earlier albums Amen and the acoustic set Moffou splendidly indicate, Salif Keita is a star in any firmament.

A 16 track compilation disc, Womadelaide: 2007 Sounds of the Planet, is also currently available.

"Sounds of the World" The Adelaide Review, No.311, March 2, 2007, p.12.

Fringe Notes

Published: 2007-03-30 *Adelaide Fringe*

Adelaide Fringe 07 Ends March 31.

Reviewed by Murray Bramwell

With the Fringe in its final week, Artistic Director Christie Anthoney can be well pleased. The festival met its hundred thousand ticket sales target by the mid-way point and has kept powering on. The Garden of Unearthly Delights has proven popular with venues offering everything from carny shows, the late night So Co Cargo club and a program of musicians at the excellent Bosco Theater. Elsewhere, the grunge Fringe ambience is alive and well – at the Fringe Factory off Light Square, Higher Ground, and at the grimy Hindley Street storefront that is the Black Lung Theatre.

Theatre in the Fringe has been adventurous, vibrant, unvarnished and, in many cases, underdone. Without the rivalry of the Festival this year the limits to the Fringe's claims for innovation have been more clearly revealed. There have been a number of experimental productions but few which really hit the mark. Early on, Melbourne company Ignite's version of Jet of Blood demonstrated that French pioneer Antonin Artaud is,ultimately, more an adjective than a playwright. Faithfully adhering to his early 20th century surrealist text, with its filmic dissolves and nightmare images of scorpions and sacrilegious travesty, Olivia Allen's production has many strengths, including Adam Gardnir's design and Hayley Forward's terrific soundscape. But its targets are mere curiosities to us now and we must conclude that the still-potent essence of Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty resides elsewhere than in his own culturally frozen neurosis.

Sakura Sayer, from Japanese company, Theatre Gumbo, brought to Holden Street a mélange of Ninja Turtles, Ed Wood sci-fi, Tokyo gameshow and teen pop sentimentality in energetic bursts of humour and pathos. The painstaking effort to deliver in English, and even include Australian references, was touching - and the show, in its mix of naïve emotion and fearless satire on such no-go areas as 9/11, has left us fascinated and bemused.

At the Black Lung Theatre, in residence in an enterprisingly transformed derelict space in the West End, sentiment and satire are separated in two works. Kissy Kissy, featuring Mark Winter and Sarah-Jane St Clair and directed by Daniel Koerner, followed the rise and fall of a relationship from courtship to bustup, using pop music, romance and authentic banality, while Rubeville, a bitter portrait of an underclass ménage, written by Thomas Henning, deconstructed its own misogynist nastiness only to restate it. It is energetic theatre (with an excellent band) but is yet another in a long line from Burroughs and Bukowski to the smirky nihilism of Pulp Fiction. Maybe it's time to find another vein. Black Lung have given us that genuine Fringe edge, though, and close the festival with their musical without music, Avast.

In a more experiential style is A Fractured Feeling, directed by Goldele Osmond and performed by a Melbourne group calling themselves Transcendent Circle. The subject is Dissociated Identity Disorder – the retreat into multiple identities to escape trauma. The representation of the divided self is strongly achieved and well suited, of course, to theatrical presentation. Uneven, over-ambitious and raw, this is also brave and perceptive theatre.

Differently intriguing is Politely Savage by My Darling Patricia, a Sydney based company presented by Vitalstatistix. Part installation, part mystery tour, MDP use retro-lounge décor and audience participation cocktails to disorient us for a dreamy narrative about Alice Springs, the dry-bed Todd River and its subsequent flooding - bringing with it the remains of past crimes and lost souls. It is Twin Peaks with puppets, tiny flickering animated films and ladies in sixties bridesmaid frocks drifting through the reeds. Cryptic, oddly over-written, hectoring at times, painterly in presentation, it succeeds in being strangely memorable.

And what is the Fringe without comedy ? Notable among a long list of usual suspects is Rod Quantock, who didn't talk about John and Jeanette, as planned, but proved he is still a tremendously resourceful ad lib, despite a tendency to show-stopping pessimism. Also, local comic Mark Trenwith, who with a droll use of short films, iPod and other power points, animatedly described his attempts to be a more publicly friendly, and Mark Watson, a diffident and very funny Welshman, who has had too many bad encounters with muggers and beggars to trust anyone much. But the pick of the funnies (at least before Ardal O'Hanlon and Dylan Moran arrive) is Fiona O'Loughlin, hilariously negligent mother of five, and marvellously understated speaker of what oft we thought, but ne'er so well-expressed.

The Adelaide Review, No.313, March 30, 2007, p.18.

Thriving outside Festival's shadow

Published: 2007-03-30 *Adelaide Fringe*

March 29 Adelaide

Adelaide Fringe 07 Mutzenball by Little Black Box Fringe Factory Until March 31` Tickets: $ 20. Bookings at Fringetix. Ph.8418 8666

B File by Deborah Levy Stone/Castro Company Holden Street Theatre March 26

Ross Noble – Fizzy Logic Royalty Theatre until March 31 Tickets: $ 40. Bookings at Fringetix. Ph.8418 8666 Melbourne International Comedy Festival April 5 – 21. Ticketmaster 1300 660 013

Mark Watson Nova Cinema 2 until March 31 Tickets: $29. Bookings at Fringetix. Ph.8418 8666 Melbourne International Comedy Festival April 5 – 29. Ticketmaster 1300 660 013

Ardal O'Hanlon Nova Cinema 2 until March 31. Tickets: $ 29. Bookings at Fringetix. Ph.8418 8666 Melbourne International Comedy Festival April 5 – 29. Ticketmaster 1300 660 013

Fiona O'Loughlin Nova Cinema 2 until March 31. Tickets: $29.90. Bookings at Fringetix. Ph.8418 8666 Melbourne International Comedy Festival April 5 – 29. Ticketmaster 1300 660 013

The Adelaide Fringe is rolling into its final weekend and newly appointed Artistic Director, Christie Anthoney, can now enjoy the ride. The shift to annual rotation has had its pressures but even by the midway point the Fringe was registering target sales of a hundred thousand tickets. Its claim to being the biggest such event outside Edinburgh still conspicuously stands, with the flow of registrations proving almost as strong as last year. But without the Adelaide Festival to provide that solid presence against which the Fringe can play the noisy younger sibling, the sprawling, amorphous nature of the event is more evident than usual.

Characterising the Fringe is reminiscent of the three blind men each claiming to describe an elephant. With so many aspects to the program – comedy, cabaret, theatre, music, literature, visual arts, kids' programs and other specialties – it is hard to know which part of the pachyderm one is talking about. It might be a large ear, a leg, or, as is sometimes the case, something perilously close to the tail.

Uncurated and - unlike the Festival - unable to provide direct support to participants, the Fringe is hostage to the goodwill, optimism and resourcefulness of its participants. As in Edinburgh, the comedy cohort, many of them very familiar suspects from radio and TV, can count on celebrity to sell tickets for shows getting match fit for the Melbourne Comedy Festival. For theatre companies, it is a tougher deal and, in past years, some have crashed and burned for want of audiences. This year, the Holden Street Theatres proved a successful venue, and the Black Lung Theatre reached near cult status with its season in temporary digs in a gamy part of Hindley Street. But the theatre offerings, with notable exceptions, have been strong on determination and enthusiasm and short on polish, worldliness and flair.

Usually there are headliners from Edinburgh to set some pace. This time, the excellent Guy Masterson has obliged with his Dylan Thomas shows and Irish actor, Aidan Dooley, with his memorable account of unsung Antarctic hero, Tom Crean. But such actorly shows have been fewer – and in 2009 let's hope they will be more plentiful. Instead, local and interstate companies, such as Black Lung, Ignite, My Darling Patricia and Little Black Box have opted for more experimental, intuitive and, sometimes, roughly formed offerings.

Mutzenball, a lively late night cabaret, directed by Daisy Brown and propelled by musician Mario Spate features revelations, meditations and accusations on the sex lives of four performers who pout, squirm and simulate but also reflect on doubts, anxieties and inhibitions in ways that suggest Gen Y, also, has as many questions as it has answers.

.Stone/Castro bring menace and humour in a disturbing mix to B File, a series of skits where two border guards question three women – all called Beatrice – in passport checks which turn into interrogations in multiple languages, misleadingly translated and spiraling each of the bewildered travelers into Kafkaesque anxiety. Crisply directed by Paulo Castro and featuring Jo Stone, Paolo Dos Sandos and Karen Lawrence, B File is a timely venture into the political absurd.

The comedy in the Fringe (or at least my part of the elephant - there were about a hundred listings) is determinedly personal and anecdotal rather than global and political. Although, the centrifugal energy of Ross Noble's fizzy logic seems to leap buildings in a single bound. With a snazzy decor of huge silver inflatable spheres – atoms ? He refers to them as bollocks – Noble could be fronting a TV science show. He is a nimble, witty talent and his two hour odyssey is an audience delight .

Diffidence is a frequent, but risky, comic strategy and, first time touring here, Welshman Mark Watson is testing it with Australian audiences. He finds rapport, when describing muggers who call him mate and beggars who ask for more than a pound. But he can't find anyone with a watch who can tell the correct time and wonders aloud why his gryphon joke doesn't work. He is bookish, mild and his comedy has a likeable slow fuse.

Father Dougal McGuire, known to viewers of Father Ted as the most gormless priest in Christendom, is the alter ego of Ardal O'Hanlon who, while using the occasional Dougal blank look, is an altogether more querulous character with plenty to say on wives, mothers and the Pope, as well as canine jokes for Inky the guide dog in the audience. Personable in his crankiness, O'Hanlon is instructively funny on bubble wrap, Irish folktales and the lifecycle of pyjamas.

Also outstanding on domestic detail is Alice Springs mother of five – "don't expect me to name them off the top of my head" – Fiona O'Loughlin, whose cheerful confessions of maternal negligence and cigarette and vodka delinquency are like a get-out-of-jail card to audiences, especially women, who find this deliciously poised comedy exhilarating in its irreverence.

Murray Bramwell

"Thriving outside Festival's shadow" The Australian, March 30, 2007, p.16.

A Festival of Light and Enlightenment

Published: 2007-10-26 *Adelaide Festival*

Artistic Director Brett Sheehy talks about his 2008 Adelaide Bank Festival of Arts with Murray Bramwell

The Adelaide Festival took something of a thumping in the early part of the 21st century. The Peter Sellars Experiment in 2002, while not a catastrophe in itself, nevertheless unsteadied the balance for a cultural event with a proud forty year history. Perhaps it was the timing – with other capital city festivals on the ascendant. Perth was looking good and Melbourne, especially, was very much on the rise with three excellent festivals guided by Robyn Archer, energized by her 1998 and 2000 Adelaide stints. 2002 - with its dysfunctional organization and Sellars' own reluctance to provide the narrative needed to navigate such a radical departure – resulted in a disconnection with the faithful and a loss of confidence in the brand. These things can happen quickly in the fickle and volatile world of cultural events but thankfully, the modest and good-natured festival from Stephen Page in 2004 steadied the ship.

However, even when Brett Sheehy, ten year veteran as Deputy Director and then Chief Executive of the Sydney Festival, was announced for the 2006 fixture, Adelaide's reputation, particularly in the Eastern states, was far from rehabilitated.

"I was appointed in September, 2003, Sheehy recalls, "and some in the press said to me: 'You must have rocks in your head to direct the Adelaide Festival.' And it hit me for a six – to me, this was one of the dream festival jobs in the world and yet here was this perception that it was wounded and that no-one would want to do it. So I went into 2006 thinking - 'this is a very fragile thing that this city owns and feels is very damaged. I've got a job here to build the image.'"

And with its central motifs of flight, and a launch at the bright new International Airport, the 2006 Adelaide Bank Festival took off - with renewed sponsorship and some serious money from the government. It even became a centrepiece of Mike Rann's sliced-bread-and-many-circuses March re-election campaign. With a strong program and a surplus from Page's event, Sheehy's first festival went on to break attendance records and raise returns in 2006. All in all, it was a happy time, with a balanced program and with Nora (the Berlin Schaubuhne's version of Ibsen's A Doll's House) and William Forsythe's Three Atmospheric Studies adding to the legend of the Adelaide Festival, as previous events from Brook, Bausch, the Rustavelis, Lepage and Mark Morris had done.

Now, it is with increased confidence and certainty that Brett Sheehy enters this further phase for the Adelaide Festival - and his final round - in March next year. A shy, mercurial fellow he has not courted public attention, nor has he become a household word. I saw him walking through Rundle Mall recently – in jeans, casual shirt and sunnies - and not a single head turned in recognition. But, providing media briefings at the Hilton Hotel prior to the bells-and-whistles launch in the Festival Theatre, he is, as ever, all energy and enthusiasm, outlining his program at rattling speed and beaming with justifiable pride at the elegance and substance of his program.

The themes are light and enlightenment – notions not so much contrived but observed once the program had been finalized. Sheehy is careful not to make grandiose claims for patterns and threads in his programming but he is careful to make sure all the main food groups are covered. He has been taking careful note of the make-up of the Adelaide Festival in the last while – as he explains:

"Something I have been wrestling with since the last festival – and something the East Coast media has been talking about – is identifying each of the capital city festivals and making them distinct from one another. When I came to Adelaide, the way I felt it was different was that it is the most holistic of all the arts festivals and every art form is dealt with. In Sydney I presented one small chamber opera and a few classical programs in my time there.

"Coming back here last year I wanted to reinforce that, to make Adelaide separate from the rest, because it is the case that it is producing work across every art form – opera, classical music, and the visual arts especially - and these are areas most other capital city festivals are abandoning. The other thing that is glaringly obvious is that no matter how large the arts festival programs get in Sydney and Melbourne that complete festival experience is unrepeatable. Only two cities in the world are doing that – Edinburgh and Adelaide."

For 2008 Sheehy is refocusing the outdoor sites for the festival by literally putting a spotlight on North Terrace. Calling the event Northern Lights, he has planned a series of massive projections on the facades of the major buildings of the cultural boulevard– including an Acropolis superimposed on the Art Gallery. Each night from dusk until 2 am the architecture will be illuminated and transformed and for the festival's opening night event, Ignition, North Terrace will be cordoned off from Kintore Avenue to Pulteney Street for a light and pyrotechnics show synchronised to a live soundtrack devised and performed by featured US musician Daniel Bernard Roumain, aka DBR, and his band, The Mission.

The shift to North Terrace Sheehy also sees as a topographical link to the Fringe in the East End and the enlarged Persian Garden festival club which has moved to include the Festival Centre Amphitheatre in Elder Park. The rapprochement with the Fringe is deliberate offsetting any sense of competition. "We are such completely separate beasts ", notes Sheehy, and we perfectly complement each other."

The music program is strong. In a group of events entitled Musical Mavericks, the director has gathered an impressive array or works by living masters. The opera, opening on leap year's February 29, and winner of this year's Grammys for Best Classical and Best Opera Recording, is Ainadamar (Fountain of Tears) by Argentinian composer Osvaldo Golijov, libretto by David Henry Hwang. Based on the death of Lorca in the Spanish Civil War in 1936, Fountain of Tears, Sheehy describes as "shot through with fantastic Spanish melody lines" and, directed by Graeme Murphy, will feature the ASO with guitarists Slava and Leonard Grigoryan.

Book-ending the festival in the final weekend is Book of Longing, a new work by composer Phillip Glass featuring settings of poems by Leonard Cohen. Brett Sheehy has had a long association with Phillip Glass through the Sydney Festival and in the lead up to this festival has watched this project emerge since Cohen's collection was published eighteen months ago.

Fastening on to the themes of the poems Sheehy observes :

"Not only is light a key theme in the festival but also enlightenment. There is a reaction by artists to the brutality of fundamentalism both Islam and Christianity. Artists are exploring spiritual paths against these extremes. Leonard wrote these poems during his ten year devotion to Buddhism spent in an ashram in California.

"Phillip will perform live on stage with full ensemble and singers and all the visual motifs will be taken from Leonard Cohen's own drawings and water colours. This season is shared with Toronto, the Lincoln Centre in New York and the Barbican in London."

The Musical Mavericks season is enticing - incorporating performances by DBR and the Mission, the Australian String Quartet performing Gorecki, Glass and Meale, and the ASO presenting Living Toys by UK composer Thomas Ades , Last Round by Golijov and Zoom and Zip by Elena Kats-Chernin. The Adelaide Chamber Singers will present Gorecki's Misere at St Peters Cathedral and the ASO, with featured electric violinist Tracy Silverman, will present Dharma at Big Sur, the work John Adams wrote for the opening of the Walt Disney concert hall in Los Angeles. There are prominent jazz events also, with a concert by avant- garde legend, Ornette Coleman and, yet another ASO collaboration, with Billy Cobham and Colin Townes to present the Mahavishnu Orchestra jazz fusion classic Meeting of the Spirits.

In theatre there is a welcome return of the Schaubuhne company from Berlin whose Nora was a highlight in 2006. Director Thomas Ostermeier returns with a play about "the other great dysfunctional couple in world drama" – Maggie and Brick from Tennessee Williams' 1955 classic Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. Also from the Schaubhne comes Moving Target, a premiere work by Marius von Mayenburg and directed by Benedict Andrews, a graduate from Flinders University Drama Centre, whose work ranges from Ur- Faust in the 2000 Festival to an array of productions for the Sydney Theatre Company. He is now based in Berlin and his return to Adelaide with this production is much anticipated. The Kassys company from the Netherlands will present Kommer (Sorrow) a work using live performance and film which examines the lives of the actors as well as the characters they play. Another highlight will be the RSC production of A Midsummer Night's Dream. Directed by Tim Supple, and set in India, it is presented in English and six Indian and Sri Lankan dialects. With homage to the famous Peter Brook "white box" production, it has toured in India and played at Stratford to enthusiastic audiences. From South Africa's State Theatre comes Township Stories, a thriller about murders in a post-apartheid township written by Paul Grootboom and Presley Chweneyagae.

There are Australian premieres also – Brink Productions have When the Rain Stops Falling, a new play by Andrew Bovell on the theme of global warming, and Oddbodies' Sean Riley will direct his text, The Angel and the Red Priest about the life of Vivaldi.

In the dance program, To Be Straight With You, from DV8 Physical Theatre, is a likely talking point. Drawing from hours of audio interviews, director Lloyd Newson, whose Enter Achilles will be warmly remembered from the 1996 festival, takes a close look at religious fundamentalism and its view of sexuality, pleasure and gender. While Sheehy has seen many recent works dealing with these issues and programmed some before, he observes – "this one goes head-on for the vigorous debate that has to be had." Other events include Sylvie Guillem in Sacred Monsters, Force Majeure's generational study The Age I'm In as well as works by Emmanuel Gat and Chunky Move.

With an extensive film program of documentaries including Scott Hicks' Glass: A Portrait in Twelve Parts, visual arts exhibitions of major indigenous work from Michael Riley and artists from the Grand Sandy Desert, Writers' Week, Womadelaide and the Persian Garden, Sheehy's 2008 Adelaide Bank Festival is loaded to the gunnels. With additional funds from Government, this festival has the kind of heft that only a biennial event can muster. Scheduling 81 events, compared to 60 last time, Brett Sheehy has provided continuity and consolidation, innovation and a fresh approach to the familiar. Reflecting on his second effort, Sheehy muses : "when you are given two shots – to what extent do you try to reinvent the wheel, or do you develop the relationship you've already begun ? I hope this doesn't sound selfish, but I also wanted to continue this journey for myself."

"A Festival of Light and Entertainment" The Adelaide Review, No.328, October 26, 2007, pp.22-23.

Planet Soundings

Published: 2008 *WOMADelaide*

Murray Bramwell previews CDs for Womadelaide 2008

Now in its annual cycle, it seems no time at all before the next Womad program appears. Opening on March 6, the 2009 version is the thirteenth full-scale festival and again the program looks both recognizable and entirely unfamiliar. This is the paradox of the event and an important part of its success. There are few fixtures as pleasingly ritualized as Womadelaide and that is a strong reason why the numbers returning remain steadily high and why more, particularly from interstate, join the throng each year.

The constants in the formula – the Botanic Park site, the layout of the stages, the dazzling flags designed by Angus Watt, the high production values and excellent amenities, all signal to the crowds that they have returned to a zone where they can safely relax, meet friends, let their kids run free, lie under the trees and listen to a range of world music which is never less than interesting and often, quite sublime.

And while most festivals depend on the established reputation and cred of the line-up – for instance the Big Day Outers this year were being lured by Neil Young and Arctic Monkeys – with Womad there is always a new list of names few of us have heard of. It is this willingness on the part of audiences to suspend doubt (if not disbelief) and a confidence in the range and flair of the scheduling that makes Adelaide's festival of the world such an enduring attraction.

2009 will be no exception. Among some well-known names are many that are new – and sampling their music from their recent CDs, there are many distinctive new sounds to enjoy. So, no better time than now to browse the record shops, websites, downloads, MySpace,YouTube and any other virtual emanations, for a taste of the music we will hear in March.

The headliners this time are Seun Kuti and Fela's Egypt 80, the Nigerian AfroBeat sensations, 16 musicians strong, it is a high energy sound with urgent messages, many sung in English, to Think Afrika. They appear only once on Saturday night, along with Justin Adams and the Juldeh Camara Trio, whose CD, Soul Science – is a mix of roots and blues, griot and a very hypnotic one-stringed fiddle called a ritti. A Friday highlight will be AfroBeat veteran, Tony Allen whose extended grooves on the double CD Afro Disco Beat promise much.

Other intriguing crossovers are Speed Caravan featuring the electric oud of Algerian Mehdi Haddab whose CD, Kalashnik Love even includes a version of the Cure's Killing an Arab, and Ska Cubano – as their name suggests a Jamaican Cuban combination. Their album, Ay Caramba even includes a zany version of Istanbul (not Constantinople) It is going to be the year for interesting beats, mash-ups and mixes with Speed Caravan and DJ Dino Moran from South Africa. Appearing on two afternoons are the fabulous Dengue Fever – a blend of California psychedelics from brothers Ethan and Zac Holtzmann and the vocals of Cambodian woman, Chhom Nimo. Listen to their CD Venus on Earth, their sets will be a must.

The contingent of women is always strong at Womad and despite the unfortunate withdrawal of the legendary Latin American singer, Mercedes Sosa, there will be many others of distinction. It has just been announced that Malian singer, Rokia Traore returns for the first time since 2001 to play one show only on Sunday night, Egyptian singer Natascha Atlas's CD Ana Hina recorded with the Mazeeka Ensembmble suggests a talent of great eclectic range, while Portuguese fado music, a longtime favourite with Womad crowds, is very strongly represented by Dona Rosa whose CD Historias da Rua is well worth buying for the collection.

Mongolian-born Sa Dingding is another prospect altogether –her album, Alive is a dizzy mix of Kate Bush vocals, Peking Opera cadences and trippy electronica. She will be worth staying up for on Friday night. Playing one set only is Rachel Unthank and her band the Winterset, a UK band with strong Geordie dialect and a repertoire of traditional and new material which has captured the alt contemporary audience with a sound that sounds like equal parts Maddy Prior, the Pogues, Bjork, Joanna Newson and Beth Orton. Except the Unthanks are not quite like any of those. Their excellent CD, The Bairns is one I keep going back to.

Among all the hybrid pop-inflected music that is the Womad staple it is always a welcome contrast to thread into the more traditional acoustic program. Foremost here is the classical carnatic South Indian music of U Shrinivas – even here, though, modified for mandolin and duetting with collaborator U Rajesh on electric mandolin. They play the two late night spots on Friday and Saturday – what the regulars might call the Nusrat Hour.U Shrinivas' 1995 CD, Dawn Raga (RealWorld) is an excellent introduction to their hypnotic sound.

Another highlight will be the delectably named Dimi Mint Abba, whose CD Moorish Music from Mauritania features her haunting vocals accompanied by (and here are some more esoteric instruments to learn about) the harp-like, ardin and the lute-like, tidnit. Senegalese band, Seckou Keita SKQ exponents of the West African harp, the kora are another treat in store. Their CD is entitled The Silimbo Passage.

The Australian and Pacific region program is again strong and varied. Many of us have been listening to Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu's extraordinary self titled CD, Gurrumul, a unique vocal experience soon, you'd have to think, to become a widely discovered world music classic. To hear Gurrumul perform at Womad will be a festival highpoint. Adelaide musicians are well-represented – ARIA winners, The Audreys with their terrific When The Flood Comes, former Fruit singer, Susie Keynes has a new trio Redhead, and Akoustic Odyssey cover material included in their accomplished CD Ilios. From the region comes Mihirangi from Aotearoa New Zealand, PNG's Tatana Village Choir and East Timorese singer, Ego Lemos. Womad favourites The Cat Empire, featuring their album So Many Nights, will be welcomed back, especially by their legion of young fans and , if all that isn't enough, just announced for one show on Sunday afternoon, Neil Finn will perform solo – his first return since the truly magic Crowded House set on the very first night of Womadelaide back in 1992.

The Adelaide Review, January 2008.

Looking Through the Fringe

Published: 2008-02-10 *Adelaide Fringe*

Murray Bramwell previews some of the 2008 program

There is something almost inexplicably exponential about the Adelaide Fringe. It just keeps getting bigger. From its modest beginnings 48 years ago, it has continued – like its Edinburgh namesake – to play doppelganger and frisky sibling to the main Festival. And, as in Edinburgh, it has expanded so greatly that it dwarfs the Festival itself - in size at least, if not in substance. The relationship between Festival and Fringe, once tetchy, is now cordial to the point where the two are symbiotic, each energizing and highlighting the other's achievement.

To talk about the Fringe is always to indulge in gargantuan statistics, but they are unavoidable in telling the story. The 2008 Fringe website lists 543 events, 5470 performances and estimates something like 3000 participating artists. That is nearly eighty more events than in 2006 which posted a then-record 465 fixtures. That's a lot of action and a potentially huge audience. It also precipitates a struggle for survival of Darwinian proportions. And, while not every baby turtle reaches the sea – a surprising number of events, boosted by niche audiences, friends, families, groupies and general devotees, manage to meet their objectives artistically and their quotas numerically. No-one gets rich – although there are always healthy queues around the block for comedians and cult favourites - but most feel recognized and rewarded, and, with any luck, few will lose their shirt, or their sanity, in the business of putting on a show.

The Fringe theatre listings are again numerous this year – I counted 105 in the guide, plus another 54 cabaret shows and 119 in the comedy section. The theatre and cabaret events are ever valiant, competing as they do with radio comics and TV personalities such as Rove, Dave Hughes and Corinne Grant, but there is plenty on offer - from school and community groups to local professionals, and performances transferring from Edinburgh and other venues on the international circuit.

Among the latter contingent is regular UK performer and director Guy Masterson. This year he introduces the politically topical American Poodle , Follow Me (about capital punishment) and Goering's Defence, based on the infamous trial at Nuremberg. All will be at the Fringe Factory Theatre in Elizabeth Street. Guy will also perform his much-loved Under Milk Wood at the Royalty.

Holden Street Theatres are again hosting some quality imports including Berkoff's Women, a series of excerpts performed by Linda Marlowe from English playwright, Steven Berkoff's greatest hits – Decadence, East, Greek and others. Also, Josh Richards presents Playing Burton, an exploration of Welsh star, Richard Burton's tumultuous career. Both promise to be highlights. Also featuring at Holden Street are Urban Myth with their adaptation of 1984, Victorian company Three to a Room with An Air Balloon over Antarctica, The Good Thief by Irish playwright Conor McPherson and magick from Wayne Anthoney in Prospero's Island.

Local company Vitalstatistix will present (in a joint venture with WA's Deckchair) Hilary Bell's play Memmie le Blanc at the Queens Theatre, venue also for Yashchin Company's Marquez adaptation I Only Came to Use the Phone. The Border Project will present their choose-your-own-adventure, Trouble on Planet Earth at the Crumpet Theatre, Eddy Knight has a new play, Final Contract at the Bakehouse and Accidental Productions are staging Seven Seconds, a German play by Falk Richter, at the new Higher Ground in Light Square.

The Garden of Unearthly Delights is again in full swing with Acrobat, an extensive program of puppetry works, Daniel Kitson in The Ballad of Rodger and Grace, cabaret artistes Meow Meow and Camille the Dark Angel, and Pig Island from The Glass Boat. Music includes the ever-intriguing Stephen Cummings, Old Man River and Kate Miller-Heidke. Elsewhere, at the Masonic Centre, La Clique have a show running for a full three week season and Adrian Bohm, who always brings something extra to the Fringe, has scheduled one-night-only gigs by guitar wizard Leo Kottke and singer-songwriter, Ron Sexsmith.

The Adelaide Review, Feb 10, 2008.

Captivating celebration of the unexpected

Published: 2008-02-28 *Adelaide Fringe*

February 27

Adelaide Fringe 08

Playing Burton Performed by Josh Richards The Arch, Holden Street Theatres, Hindmarsh Tickets $19.50 - $ 24.90 Until March 16

The Smile Off Your Face Ontroerend Goed The Jelly Belly, Fringe Factory Theatre, Elizabeth St Tickets $12 - $15 Until March 16

La Clique The Masonic Centre, 254 North Terrace Tickets $40- $50 Until March 16 Bookings at FringeTix Ph1300 374643.

Now an annual fixture the Adelaide Fringe comes back sooner - and literally bigger - than ever. The 2008 version has a record 543 events listed in its uncurated program, that's up from a previous best of 465 in 2006. Based, like the Adelaide Festival, on its Edinburgh model, it has come a long way in 48 years – to the point where the unruly, rambunctious younger sibling is often taken for the Festival itself. Already a week underway, the vital signs are excellent – with long winding queues waiting for stand-up comics and burlesque, crowds spilling on to the pavements from bars and cafes, and Rundle Park, alias The Garden of Unearthly Delights, sprouting with food, fun, freaks and late night carny show action.

Among the three thousand scheduled artists is Josh Richards, at The Arch at Holden Street Theatres, with his one man show, Playing Burton. Elegantly written by Mark Jenkins and performed with a velvet Welsh baritone, it traces the transformation of Richard Jenkins, twelfth child of a mining family, to Richard Burton, star of the West End and Hollywood, the only actor to earn a million dollars playing Hamlet. Even as he drowns in his own vodka, Richards eloquently reminds us of Burton's extraordinary gift and the prison house of celebrity. In the cavernous maze of the Old Balfours Pie Factory, in the Jelly Belly Room, is the Belgian performance group, Ontroerend Goed, waiting to take its audience three and four at a time into a darkened and restricted world. Each audience member for The Smile Off Your Face is required to wear a blindfold, have wrists tied and sit in a wheelchair ready to face – who knows what ? My hands are placed against a whiskery face, a voice talks quietly in my ear asking me about my day, the state of my heart, my happiness.

For twenty five minutes we are in this dark and unexplained space, with ambient music, disembodied conversation and sudden, but mostly unperturbing, movement. This is an exercise in liberation, a form of benign rendition, where we listen and respond instinctively, even as we are prevented from knowing where we are. The smile is taken off our face in exchange for a teardrop, a divulged secret, a reflection about who we really are. This is a gently capitivating experience.

At the Masonic Centre, in a whirl of stage smoke and raucous beats is the brilliant La Clique, burlesque show of the first order. Performing in rapid succession are lounge lizard Mikelangelo, the hyper-jointed Captain Frodo, Amy G's goofy skate and kazoo turns, the brilliantly poised English Gents, and David O'Mer, bathtub aerialist in a splash of glamour.

Murray Bramwell

"Captivating celebration of the unexpected" The Australian, February 28, 2008, p.10

Fringe Notes

Published: 2008-02-29 *Adelaide Fringe*

Reviewed by Murray Bramwell

With a Friday night party in Rundle Street which brought early rain and an estimated forty thousand revelers, artists, organizers, supporters, and variously innocent bystanders, the Fringe has begun. It is on for one and all - with the weekend Clipsal fans also joining the throng and plenty of Ford and Holden regalia visible on the streets, queuing for shows, and sampling the wares in the Garden of Unearthly Delights.

The response to the Fringe is bigger than ever, with reports of 90,000 tickets sold before opening night and punters opening their wallets for walk-up ticket purchases at sites all over the CBD. At the Fringe Factory venue, formerly the Balfour's site in Elizabeth Street (off Waymouth Street) there is within its cavernous area (haunted, no doubt, by the ghosts of frog cakes and party pies) a maze of performing spaces edibly named The Crumpet, The Tea Room, the Jelly Belly, and The Pastry Bakery.

Back again at this year's Fringe is UK performer, Guy Masterson with American Poodle, a two part exploration of Anglo-American relations. The title may hint at Tony Blair but Masterson looks at poodling back to the beginning of the American colony, where another incompetent Mad George threw the empire out with the tea leaves. Also at the Factory, Goering's Defence, directed by Masterson, and co-written and, almost affably, performed by Ross Gurney-Randall, uses the transcript from Hermann Goering's Nuremberg trial to reveal an early and sinister example of political spin.

Holden Street Theatre has a strong list of events, including Linda Marlowe's bawdy, dyspeptic, embattled and defiant portraits in Berkoff's Women- drawn from the works of East London playwright Steven Berkoff, and Joss Richards' Playing Burton. Splendidly written by Mark Jenkins and directed by the ubiquitous Guy Masterson, this is a memorable account of Richard Burton's singular and marvelous career as actor, celebrity, lover and partner to Liz Taylor in the original Brad and Angelina team of Hollywood Babylon. Richards not only has the Welsh velvet voice, he captures the struggle from poverty and torment by alcohol which subverted and finally destroyed an extraordinary artist and self-made star.

Among the monologues it is also good to see plenty of ensemble theatre. At the newly located Higher Ground in Light Square and home of the Fringe Club, Accidental Productions are presenting Seven Seconds (In God We Trust) by German playwright Falk Richter, a fast-moving deconstructed theatre work lampooning the American Empire as only Europeans can. Briskly performed (and tightly directed by Joh Hartog) it is uneven in impact but chilling in its reminder that every missile sent from ten thousand meters has a human target., Vital-statistix (at the QueensTheatre) feature this year with Memmie Le Blanc, an intriguing play by Hillary Bell about a feral child brought back into human society - Anni Lindner is excellent in the lead. At onefortyfive Hindley Street, floogle is presenting two new works – Conclusions on Ice, a five-minutes-to-midnight absurdist view of life as we will soon not recognize it, and Ollie and the Minotaur, an ambitious contemporary drama about three women friends and a life-changing secret, written by Patrick Graham directed by Sarah John.

The Garden of Unearthly Delights has everything on offer, from the raggedly awful efforts of the Town Bikes and After Dinner Mince to Camille, the Dark Angel – terrific with Brel and blues, and all voltage for Nick Cave's The Mercy Seat. Acrobat return, as they say themselves –Smaller, Poorer and Cheaper - and with that dark intensity and punk disdain that is their signature. Charlie Pickering is gently hilarious with his tales of social inadequacy and quotes from the autobiography of BB King. And, for something completely arcane and majestic - head to the Masonic Centre for La Clique. Amy G on skates and kazoo, the English Gents amazing in their power of two, Captain Frodo, the human rubbery figure and David O'Mer, the splashiest aerialist you'll find. It is all clicking with La Clique and this is only week one.

"On for one and all" The Adelaide Review, No 336, February 29, 2008, p.18

Adelaide Festival Theatre

Published: 2008-03-03 *Adelaide Festival*

Murray Bramwell

When the Rain Stops Falling by Andrew Bovell in collaboration with Hossein Valamanesh Brink Productions and State Theatre Company of South Australia Scott Theatre, Adelaide. February 28. Tickets $25 - $60. Bookings BASS 131 246 Until 15 March.

Moving Target by Marius von Mayenburg Translated by Maja Zade Malthouse Theatre and Sydney Opera House Odeon Theatre, Adelaide. February.29 Tickets $25 -$49. Bookings Venue*TIX (08) 8225 8888. Until March 8.

Two keenly anticipated works have been unveiled for the first time at the Adelaide Festival. In 2004 The Extinction Project began with Brink Productions' Chris Drummond, distinguished visual artist Hossein Valamanesh, writer Andrew Bovell and a strong interest in Tim Flannery's book The Future Eaters. The result has morphed into When The Rain Stops Falling, a spell-binding saga of four generations reaching forward to 2039, and Alice Springs which now has tropical rainfall and fish falling from the sky. But the turbulent climate change is only a backdrop to the weather the estranged characters take with them through lives of silent regret, abandonment and emotional incomprehension.

These are Bovell signatures, familiar from Lantana, and even bolder here, where co-incidence is a magical expectation and predestination the road most traveled. Those closest to the characters cannot connect, only random encounters and events bring on revelations. Elegantly designed by Valamanesh in pale tones with screens, simple furniture, and sparing use of video projections by TheimaGen, the production, deftly directed by Chris Drummond, places its focus directly on the excellent performances – in duets mostly, with Bovell's unerring dialogue gradually disclosing mysteries and misunderstandings. The cast is strong, and Carmel Johnson, Neil Pigot, Yalin Ozucelik and Paul Blackwell are outstanding. We cannot easily predict the changes in the world's weather but the forecast for Andrew Bovell's finely observed, splendidly crafted play looks bright indeed.

In their first collaboration outside Berlin, leading director Benedict Andrews and writer Marius von Mayenburg have devised Moving Target for Malthouse Theatre. Using six highly inventive performers and such workaday items as a shabby sofa, two chairs, a table and cloth, a sleeping bag, and a child's doll, Moving Target . begins with apparently spontaneous, often amusing, games of Coming Ready or Not, the group playfully establish connections and rapport.

The time and place is indeterminate but all the time they are talking of someone who poses a threat to them, about whom they intuit danger, premonitions of harm. They are alert and alarmed, and their suspicions extend to a child and a mysterious green parcel. Will they contact the Orwellian Advice Centre with their suspicions ? How can they notify the Task Force and maintain the safety of their anonymity ? Andrews artfully ratchets up the paranoia while charting the anxieties exhibited in adult social conformity using the analogy of children's games. Much has been written about the self- defeating consequences of counter-terrorism, but in its provocative theatricality, Moving Target cleverly takes us inside the loop for ourselves.

The Australian 3 March, 2008

Narrative fail to nail their man

Published: 2008-03-10 *Adelaide Festival*

The Angel and The Red Priest by Sean Riley Music direction by Gabriela Smart Oddbodies Theatre Company Adelaide Centre for the Arts, Light Square. March 2.

Lovers and Haters by Maureen Sherlock and Rob George Music by Quentin Eyers Prospect Productions and the Adelaide Festival Norwood Town Hall, March 6. Tickets $40- $50. Bookings BASS 131 246 Until March 16.

Two new works in the Adelaide Festival dealing with historical figures have produced wildly different results. The priest in The Angel and the Red Priest is a young Antonio Vivaldi, in a Venetian orphanage where the young women are trained as singers to perform for the well-to-do. Writer Sean Riley has developed his text from a radio play and it features five musicians performing excerpts of Vivaldi's work. The central focus is on the shy, institutionalised Agata (Johanna Allen) who, smitten with the composer (Stephen Sheehan) and yearning for the wider world, looks to the music to set her free. Although appealingly designed by Dean Hills and given a Titian glow by Susan Grey-Gardner, the production is theatrically undeveloped as if it never reconciles the mix of music and narrative. And there is only an unsurprising inevitablity when Agata is abandoned by the man for all four seasons.

There is little known about Vivaldi's life but a great deal is known about Don Dunstan even though, extraordinarily, he still awaits a proper biographer. Maybe that's the problem when Lovers and Haters takes on an ambitious slice of the former South Australian premier's controversial career. There is passing reference, all from Don himself, about his accomplishments, but much more to say about his foibles and indiscretions. Unlike Keating the Musical! which simplifies to succeed and wears its enthusiasm on its Armani sleeve, Lovers and Haters makes a number of disconcerting and unresolved shifts in tone and point of view. Writers Rob George and Maureen Sherwood might well say, that using the elements of an undergraduate revue, they are not taking their task too seriously but the effects of their flippancy can be serious anyway.

There is great material to be found in the public life of Dunstan- the pink hot pants in Parliament, his trip to the sea shore to send back the predicted tidal wave, his forthright decision to sack his police commissioner and his unapologetic championing of the arts – both theatrical and culinary.Then there is the compromising saga of his relationship with John Ceruto. This, and his marriage to Adele Koh are explored in a mix of clunky dialogue and precariously performed song - and the effect, deliberate or not, is lampoon. In the lead, Todd McDonald looks the part, but fails to capture what impressed about Dunstan despite his flaws. If this was all there is, much less would be at stake. So this production will have its own lovers and haters. It is a sad irony, perhaps, that the only politician to deserve having a theatre named after him, should be depicted - in the Adelaide Festival itself - in such a ramshackle, if ultimately well-meaning, production.

Murray Bramwell

"Narrative fail to nail their man" The Australian, March 10, 2008, p.16.

Adelaide Festival Theatre

Published: 2008-03-13 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof by Tennessee Williams Schaubuhne am Lehniner Platz Berlin Her Majesty's, Adelaide. March 11. Until 16 March.

Since one of the highlights of Brett Sheehy's 2006 Adelaide Festival was Nora, the theatrically inventive re-framing of Ibsen's A Doll's House by Berlin's Schaubuhne Theatre, the company's scheduled return this year with Cat on a Hot Tin Roof has created high expectations and a great opportunity for festival audiences not only to renew the connection with director Thomas Ostermeier's work but to build on it.

Set on a cotton plantation in the Mississippi Delta, Tennessee Williams' play is a family drama of mythic dimensions. Ruled over by the self-made Big Daddy (part King Lear, part Zeus, part Dr Phil) is his compliant wife Big Mama and two sons, the obedient but despised Gooper and the prodigal Brick - alcoholic, and sexually and spiritually inert. Also present are their very contrasting wives the grasping Mae, with her bratty "no-neck" children, and Maggie, the restless, frustrated cat on the hot tin roof.

In this Schaubuhne production the stage design has many of the familiar Ostermeier signatures – the plantation house is a high wall of black framed glass (through which we often see the performers in strongly lit tableaux) with low slung retro-modern lounges at centre stage. Instead of the huge aquarium which featured in Nora, reminding us that the heroine was a fish out of water, here, high above the action, in a glassed-in eyrie, set on a horizontally suspended tree bough, is a large buzzard-like bird, apparently presiding over the flailing human events below.

While there are interesting updates in staging – Brick (Mark Waschke) sulkily channel surfs TV as he drinks, Maggie (the excellent Julie Bowe) prowls the room in red lingerie while Led Zeppelin's Baby I'm Gonna Leave You blares out - this adaptation has leached from the play the very vitality it needs to make it work. In the original text, as if drowning in bad faith, Brick refers repeatedly to disgust and mendacity (here, the peculiar word "strategize" is used in the English surtitles) His battle is with his father but they also understand each other. Brick's repressed sexual feelings towards his dead friend Skipper are drawn out by his father as if he were a therapist or a redeemer. As Big Daddy, Josef Bierbichler sometimes hits those powerful chords but not often and, when Brick, the hero who would be neither scion nor sire, weeps at the end, the audience is almost bewildered.

Where the contemporary setting revitalized Nora and gave it an urgent satiric dimension, here, in its ironic distance, and languid under-performance, profound oppositions are reduced to cake fights and anguish to mere petulance. The play has been deconstructed but not revealed.

Murray Bramwell

"Woolly deconstruction of a cotton-picking classic", The Australian, March 13, 2008. p.10.

Adelaide Festival 2008 Theatre

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"Woolly deconstruction of a cotton-picking classic", The Australian, March 13, 2008. p.10.

Hot Stuff

Published: 2008-03-14 *WOMADelaide*

Womadelaide 2008 Botanic Park March 7 - 9

Reviewed by Murray Bramwell

Womadelaide this year will be remembered because the weather was seriously hot - and so was the music program. When even the usually green swath of Botanic Park is looking parched and dusty we know that climate change is not just an Al Gore lecture and the current drought is getting very worrying. The temperatures climbed into the forties and day time sessions tested even the young and the faithful. Predicting the shifting shade patterns of the park's trees has become a new art form. Despite all this, attendances remained high and weekend tickets sold out before the event. Womad continues stronger than ever.

Certainly, the Friday night program that had something for all demographics. The John Butler Trio commanded Stage 1, the guitarist working the effects pedals from slide to squelch as he played the sounds of the Australian summer – rootsy blues, guitar rags and radio hits that had the groundlings buzzing. The Black Arm Band, with a cavalcade of great Indigenous musicians, stood proud with a history of sorrow turned to determination – video screens depicted Freedom rides, Eddie Mabo and, at last, Sorry Day, marking a national shift in spirit which also infused this event with up-beat celebration.

A world away, but linked in purpose, was Mavis Staples, doyen of gospel and member of the famous family who in the early 1960s marched step to step with Dr King. With back up singers and accompanied by a haunting tremolo guitar, Ms Staples' voice was extraordinary in range and expression. With classics like Eyes on the Prize and Wade in the Water, interspersed with Buffalo Springfield's What's that Sound and the Band favourite,The Weight, it was a great set. She may have been tongue-tied over the city's name – "Allerdaide, aw shucks : Lemonade" - but the big-hearted singer offered a much finer elixir. Mavis Staples' marvelous voice took us to a well of music all her own.

It was a good year for Australian artists. In addition to John Butler were Bob Evans (aka Kevin Mitchell), the accomplished Sarah Blasko and popular goodtime band, The Beautiful Girls. Don McGlashan's set at high noon on Saturday reminded us what a fine songwriter the former Mutton Birds front man is, while the other Kiwi group, Kora and Samoan dance company Black Grace also played to enthusiastic reception.

The gypsy sound infused this year's event – the amazing Taraf de Haidouks, the Titi Robin Quartet and the zany Kerem Quartet while Clube de Balanco and Victor Valdes provided the latin sounds. A big blow to the program was the late withdrawal of headliner Cesaria Evora due to serious illness. Her band valiantly covered the first set on Saturday and for Sunday night, Sharon Jones, soul star of the Daptones label from Brooklyn, New York stepped energetically up to the plate.

A true world music highlight this year was the Saturday night performance from Toumane Diabate and his Symmetric Orchestra. A 71st generation griot and virtuoso of the kora, the 21 stringed West African harp, he led his excellent band through an effortlessly fluent show, traditional sounds mixed artfully with electric instruments - and Diabate explaining and guiding the audience through the experience. It epitomized the best of Womad just when the definition of world music was starting to look a little ragged.

"Hot Stuff" The Adelaide Review , No. 337, March 14, 2008, p.20.

Shouldn’t give up his night job

Published: 2008-03-17 *Adelaide Fringe · Comedy*

Adelaide Fringe 2008 Comedy Rove McManus

Thebarton Theatre, Adelaide March 15. Melbourne Comedy Festival Melbourne Town Hall April 10-12. Tickets $39.90 – $ 44.50.

On stage for Rove McManus’s stand-up gig at the Thebarton Theatre is a giant picture of a goldfish in a bowl. The fish has large Disney eyes and extruding from its tail, in streaming black calligraphy comes Rove’s famous name. It is a joke very much at his own expense and it is a likeable one. Rove McManus, star of the fishbowl of television, winner of Logies and a household word, someone who has his name in lights, now has his name in fish poo.

It is part of his gags to riches legend that McManus’s day job was in stand-up before his remarkable rise to network television and, once again, Rove has taken to the boards for a national comedy tour undertaken in stages across the year. He last performed live in 2005 and most recently at the Melbourne Comedy Festival in 2000.

In his opening gig in the last weekend of the Adelaide Fringe he is looking trim and relaxed as the crowd greets him with squeals and phone cameras. This is Rove actually live – out of the fishbowl and joking about his logo. He points out that the fish had to excrete his name backwards – ‘e’ first. It’s a smart joke about having to see the whole concept before you start.

Which is something he may need to do for his show as well. There is something strangely innocent about his approach to his comedy, as if he can ignore his celebrity and make lame jokes like the old days. He is topical with the Adelaide heatwave, there are ruminations about MySpace and FaceBook and when he needs to strike a change, inexplicably, two extras run on stage for a strobing Benny Hill chase.

But there is a reticence in the comedy and an evident need to please and not challenge. Whereas many Australian comics are derisory of the media, his television jokes are tentative and bland, using the easy name-checks of an insider unwilling to bite the hand. The jokes about the Pope’s makeover and the George Bush bloopers are fun but the material dwindles and surprises are few. There is no doubting Rove’s charm, modesty and warmth and the crowd roared at his baby bump rap. But this show isn’t playing to his strengths any more. Others can do stand up but, fishbowl or not, no one can match him at his night job.

Murray Bramwell

“Shouldn’t give up his night job” The Australian , March 17, 2008, p.16.

Festival of Light Fandangos

Published: 2008-04-01 *Adelaide Festival*

Murray Bramwell

With the 2008 Adelaide Bank Festival of Arts over for another two years we have time to reflect on what was and, perhaps, what might have been. And despite Peter Sellars' declaration, in 2002, that the era of the "big safari" festival, with its big game trophy events, is over – interest in the headliners has been as keen as ever. That is hardly surprising because, although Australians travel more than ever, the tyranny of distance is still great, and the chance to see arts events - when the world comes to us - is hard to resist.

Adelaide Festivals, featuring anything from forty to 2008's eighty events, are invariably recalled for their peak experiences. We remember 1986 when the Rustaveli Company performed Richard III, or Peter Brook in 1980 and 1988, or Robert Lepage, Pina Bausch, Cricot 2 Dead Class, the Wooster Group and Nixon in China. Any one of these events, mythologised for all time by those who were there, vindicated the festivals they were in – and much that accompanied them, which was either less memorable or actually undistinguished, has fallen away.

2008 will be remembered for a number of excellent productions – more than usual – but perhaps none of legendary status. That is no bad thing. Brett Sheehy has achieved an evenness, a fluency and connectedness with his festival. The themes have been of light and illumination - and the experience has been airy and light also. Not lightweight, but fandangos, often effortless and artful, with an emphasis on symmetry and resolution which audiences responded to.

In the theatre program there have been outright successes. Pleasingly, one of them was the local premiere work from Brink Productions, When the Rain Stops Falling by Andrew Bovell. Like State Theatre's Honk If You Are Jesus from 2006, a new commission launched in the festival deservedly found favour with both audiences and reviewers.

Of the international imports, Township Stories from South Africa, brought a harsh, turbulent drama to audiences sometimes daunted by its confronting subject matter. But if attendance numbers dwindled it was more because it ran a longer season than most productions and with a huge range of events in the Fringe also, the Adelaide audience was diffused more than usual. The Dash Arts production of A Midsummer Night's Dream proved to be a stage delight, cleverly imagined and warmly performed but A Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, from the Schaubuhne Company of Berlin, was a disappointment. Unlike their 2006 work , Nora - for many of us a highlight, - the Cat, even in a heatwave, left audiences cold. Moving Target, a new work from Benedict Andrews and Marius von Mayenburg, was skilful and engaging, if not fully successful, and reports on Kommer (Sorrow) which I regret missing, were very positive.

As in other recent Festivals, the boundaries between art forms are porous and a number of dance works using text were strongly theatrical in style. Force Majeure's The Age I'm In was a highlight, DV8's Let Me Tell You Straight was challenging and Sacred Monsters - simply outstanding. The visual arts were also terrific this time – from the Northern Lights on North Terrace to the Speed of Light program to the Biennial and Michael Riley's Cloud. And the musical highlights : a strong Womadelaide and the rare chance to see Ornette Coleman. The opera, Ainadamar, was an aural pleasure and a visual stew, and The Dharma at Big Sur with violinist Tracy Silverman and the ASO, a shimmering note to end on.

"New Light from the festival" The Adelaide Review, No.338, April 2008, pp.22-23.

Uncurated and Unexpurgated

Published: 2009-03-01 *Adelaide Fringe*

Murray Bramwell

The Fringe is back and, as someone once said, it's like a shoebox full of grasshoppers. The program numbers are up again. This time organizers are proclaiming they have broken the 500-shows-listed barrier - with 293 of them Australian premieres. Whatever all those new shows might actually mean. Some will be brilliant and we will tell our friends, some will be just good enough and maybe we won't. And some will be fascinatingly execrable and linger in the mind for days.

That is the Fringe experience - uncurated, unexpurgated, unexpected. But, if you don't want to take a chance, there are plenty of familiar warhorses returning who offer fun and no surprises. It is an extraordinary collective expression of the human impulse to perform and entertain and, for those who participate, the Fringe has an encompassing halo effect rarely apparent when small companies bravely offer their work at other times in the year.

A quick count of the listings shows cabaret with 44, theatre and circus with 75 and, while my brain fused on the final comedy total, it was around 115. This is multitudinous and, although we will have our marked out choices, dozens more will escape us until the star ratings, the buzz and the 'bugger-I missed-it's register in the mind.

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The Adelaide Review, No 349, February 2009, p.25.

Another mad and balmy March

Published: 2009-03-01 *Adelaide Fringe*

Murray Bramwell

Twenty three days and 187,000-plus tickets later, the Adelaide Fringe has folded its tent, assembled its caravan and gone its diverse ways. In fact, by now it seems as if it has dematerialized – as if the Garden of Unearthly Delights in Rundle Park was never there, nor the comedy queues in Angas Street, nor for that matter, the flurry around any one of the 259 venues which have hosted this sprawling mega-event.

Director Christie Anthoney can be well-pleased with the work of her team of dedicated workers and volunteers and the city has - with the Fringe, another successful Womadelaide and the excitement of the Clipsal 500 – had a mad March party. The weather has been balmy and, for a while, the living easy. Even the Torrens replenished, just in the nick of time.

With 500 events to choose from, it wasn't hard to find plenty that tickled the fancy and even the neo-cortex. The Garden of UD proved a winner again- and provided an important epicenter for the whole festival. It also had no shortage of highlights – *Company of Strangers* offered high-class burlesque at the Spiegeltent while, at the Bosco, Sam Wills, *the Boy with Tape on his Face* delightfully redefined the rules of audience engagement with gentle coercion and playful invention. The music list included Abby Dobson, the Blackeyed Susans - and Stephen Cummings, with his ramshackle memoir of *temps perdu* and a life in Sports.

The theatre program - intrepid often, was sometimes over-reaching and disappointing. The UK imports were notably fewer and a hint that times are getting tougher in the ruck and maul of the Fringe. At the Queens, Guy Masterson made a welcome return with David Mamet's *Oleanna* (co-starring Joanne Hartstone) and Matthew Rajac's *The Tailor of Inverness,* based on the turbulent history of his Polish father in World War II, was a strong choice by Holden Street Theatres for their Edinburgh sponsorship. Also at HST, was *JP* from Japan's Theatre Group Gumbo, a phantasmagoric journey into the Forest of Truth. Farcical, earnestly sentimental, often unfathomable, you could say it left no theatrical stone unturned.

The momentum that the Fringe provides can also help Adelaide companies make their mark. Martha Lott's production of *Scarborough* by UK writer Fiona Evans, ably performed (by Emily Branford and Sebastian Freeman) in the tiny confines of the board room in the Manse at Holden Street put a forbidden tryst under the close scrutiny of an audience limited to thirteen. At the Bakehouse, *After the End* by Dennis Kelly was also about a couple taking refuge – this time in a bomb shelter, but with all the danger on the inside. With high production values and crisp direction from Daniel Clarke, actors Hannah Norris and Nick Pelomis created a gripping work that well deserves a further season. Another highlight was *Death in Bowengabbie*, Caleb Lewis's shaggy tale of a young man drawn back to a hometown where people are just dying to see him. Engagingly performed by Andrew Brackman, this is Lewis doing what he does best - telling a dark tale with a twinkle in his eye.

The Adelaide Review, No. 350, March, 2009, p.26.

Planet Soundings

Published: 2009-03-01 *WOMADelaide*

Murray Bramwell previews CDs for Womadelaide 2009

Now in its annual cycle, it seems no time at all before the next Womad program appears. Opening on March 6, the 2009 version is the thirteenth full-scale festival and again the program looks both recognizable and entirely unfamiliar. This is the paradox of the event and an important part of its success. There are few fixtures as pleasingly ritualized as Womadelaide and that is a strong reason why the numbers returning remain steadily high and why more, particularly from interstate, join the throng each year.

The constants in the formula – the Botanic Park site, the layout of the stages, the dazzling flags designed by Angus Watt, the high production values and excellent amenities, all signal to the crowds that they have returned to a zone where they can safely relax, meet friends, let their kids run free, lie under the trees and listen to a range of world music which is never less than interesting and often, quite sublime.

And while most festivals depend on the established reputation and cred of the line-up – for instance the Big Day Outers this year were being lured by Neil Young and Arctic Monkeys – with Womad there is always a new list of names few of us have heard of. It is this willingness on the part of audiences to suspend doubt (if not disbelief) and a confidence in the range and flair of the scheduling that makes Adelaide's festival of the world such an enduring attraction.

2009 will be no exception. Among some well-known names are many that are new – and sampling their music from their recent CDs, there are many distinctive new sounds to enjoy. So, no better time than now to browse the record shops, websites, downloads, MySpace,YouTube and any other virtual emanations, for a taste of the music we will hear in March.

The headliners this time are Seun Kuti and Fela's Egypt 80, the Nigerian AfroBeat sensations, 16 musicians strong, a high energy sound with urgent messages, many sung in English, to *Think Afrika*. They appear only once on Saturday night, along with Justin Adams and the Juldeh Camara Trio, whose CD, *Soul Science* – is a mix of roots and blues, griot and a very hypnotic one-stringed fiddle called a ritti. A Friday highlight will be AfroBeat veteran, Tony Allen whose extended grooves on the double CD *Afro Disco Beat* promise much.

Other intriguing crossovers are Speed Caravan featuring the electric oud of Algerian Mehdi Haddab whose CD, *Kalashnik Love* even includes a version of The Cure's *Killing an Arab*, and Ska Cubano – as their name suggests, they are a Jamaican Cuban combination. Their album, *Ay Caramba* even includes a zany version of *Istanbul (not Constantinople)* It is going to be the year for interesting beats, mash-ups and mixes with Speed Caravan and DJ Dino Moran from South Africa. Appearing on two afternoons is the fabulous, if inauspiciously named, Dengue Fever – a blend of California psychedelia from brothers Ethan and Zac Holtzmann and the vocals of Cambodian woman, Chhom Nimo. Listen to their CD *Venus on Earth*, their sets will be a must.

The contingent of women is always strong at Womad and despite the unfortunate withdrawal of the legendary Latin American singer, Mercedes Sosa, there will be many others of distinction. It has been announced that Malian singer, Rokia Traore is returning for the first time since 2001 to play one show only on Sunday night, Egyptian singer Natascha Atlas's CD *Ana Hina* recorded with the Mazeeka Ensemble suggests a talent of great eclectic range, while Portuguese fado music, a longtime favourite with Womad crowds, is very strongly represented by Dona Rosa whose CD *Historias da Rua* is well worth acquiring for your collection.

Mongolian-born Sa Dingding is another prospect altogether –her album, *Alive* is a dizzy mix of Kate Bush vocals, Peking Opera cadences and trippy electronica. She will be worth staying up for on Friday night. Playing one set only is Rachel Unthank and her band the Winterset, a UK band with strong Geordie dialect and a repertoire of traditional and new material which has captured the alt. contemporary audience with a sound which is like equal parts Maddy Prior, the Pogues, Bjork, Joanna Newson and Beth Orton. Except, of course, that the Unthanks are not quite like any of those. Their excellent CD, *The Bairns* is one I already keep going back to.

Among so much of the hybrid pop-inflected music which is now the Womad staple it is a welcome contrast to thread into the traditional acoustic program. Foremost here is the classical carnatic South Indian music of U Shrinivas. Even here, though, it is modified for mandolin and he duets with collaborator U Rajesh on electric mandolin. They play the two late night spots on Friday and Saturday – what the regulars might call the Nusrat Hour. U Shrinivas' 1995 CD, *Dawn Raga* (RealWorld) is an excellent introduction to their hypnotic sound.

Another highlight will be the delectably named Dimi Mint Abba, whose CD *Moorish Music from Mauritania* features her haunting vocals accompanied by (and here are some more esoteric instruments to learn about) the harp-like, ardin and the lute-like, tidnit. Senegalese band, Seckou Keita SKQ, exponents of the kora or West African harp, are another treat in store. Their CD is entitled *The Silimbo Passage*.

The Australian and Pacific region program is again strong and varied. Many of us have been listening to Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu's extraordinary self titled CD, *Gurrumul*, a unique vocal experience soon, you'd have to think, to become a widely discovered world music classic. To hear Gurrumul perform at Womad will be a festival highpoint. Adelaide musicians are well-represented – ARIA winners, The Audreys with their terrific *When The Flood Comes*, former Fruit singer, Susie Keynes has a new trio Redhead, and Akoustic Odyssey cover material included in their accomplished CD *Ilios*. From the region comes Mihirangi from Aotearoa New Zealand, PNG's Tatana Village Choir and East Timorese singer, Ego Lemos.

Womad favourites The Cat Empire, featuring their album *So Many Nights*, will be welcomed back, especially by their legion of young fans and , if all that isn't enough, recently announced for one show on Sunday afternoon, Neil Finn will perform – his first return since the truly magic Crowded House set on the very first night of Womadelaide back in 1992.

The Adelaide Review, March 2009

Box office feed off familiarity

Published: 2009-03-20 *Adelaide Fringe*

Adelaide Fringe 2009 February 27 to March 22 Bookings : FringeTIX – 1300 FRINGE (1300 374 643)

The Adelaide Fringe can surely claim it has something for everyone. Like its Scottish sibling in Edinburgh, and on almost the same scale, uncurated and unexpurgated the Fringe opens its wide arms to all and any. Its sheer size is extraordinary. This year saw more than 500 events listed at an incredible 259 venues. It seems like every nook, cranny, car park, derelict warehouse and former stable has been tricked up to put on a show. At Rundle Park in the city's East End, the Garden of Unearthly Delights is a carnival of strolling players, hucksters, vendors and the milling mass of Adelaide citizens and visitors checking out the vibe and lining up at venues like the Bosco and the Spiegeltent.

Elsewhere, lines stretch around the block for popular comedians such as Arj Barker and Dave Hughes, Wil Anderson and Judith Lucy. With one more weekend still to go, and an influx of Clipsal 500 fans yet to mingle in with their Ford and Holden regalia, the Fringe has already overshot its box office target with 150,000 tickets sold. The next few days are going to be busy for many, modest for some and, for others, a lean time – often despite good reviews and a positive buzz. The fortunes of the Fringe can be fickle, and certainly unfair, when the familiar and undemanding is generously received and the innovative and challenging is often overlooked.

The Fringe always has its international contingent, smaller this time but strongly represented at Holden Street Theatres by Matthew Zajac, writer and performer of *The Tailor of Inverness*. An Edinburgh success, it engagingly explores the life of the actor's father, a Polish refugee whose intriguing military service in three different armies reveals him as an unwitting cipher of history.

Another UK regular is Guy Masterson, this time teaming with SA actress Joanne Hartstone for a season, at the Queen's Theatre, of David Mamet's disturbing play, *Oleanna*, a problematic dialogue between an academic and a research student which challenges, with more than a little contrivance, the power differentials between teacher and student, man and woman. Masterson, responsible for the hugely successful *Twelve Angry Men* several Fringes ago, also presented his one man *Animal Farm* for a single performance.

Soloists abound in the keenly cost-sensitive world of the Fringe. A welcome return to the stage is John Wood, famous for TV's *Blue Heelers*, and touring with a revival, directed by Dennis Moore and designed by Shaun Gurton, of Jack Hibbert's Beckettian reverie, *A Stretch of the Imagination*. Living in a rundown caravan out in the sticks, Monk O'Neill boasts of his past and returns to his regrets as Hibbert's text revels in everything from profanity, pedantry and mock lyric. Wood offers a most entertaining, if somewhat too genial, version of the misanthropic Monk, a satire of the settler who shoots his dog, kills his horse and cuts down the only tree.

Another voice of bitter comedy is Otis Lee Crenshaw, direct from the US-Australian prisoner exchange program with a fistful of country songs with titles like *Roberta, You Gotta Quit that Ku Klux Klan*. He is alter ego of sardonic American comedian Rich Hall, who opens his own chaotic, brilliantly mercurial monologue by noting that he lost 58 minutes of material when George Bush left the White House. Also, at the Rhino Room, channeling voices from the front bar of the Criterion Hotel is Damian Callinan whose *Last Drinks* is a fresh, gently droll take on the Australian way of imbibing - both the amber fluid and the nonsense of life. By contrast, at the Bosco, Sam Wills, *The Boy with Tape on his Face*, has no voice at all but manages to get his audience up and performing in a mime and cheesy illusion show which is as delightful, ramshackle and inventive as anything you will see – and not quite believe.

The Fringe is when we first see the next round of talents – whether Callinan and Wills – or young theatre tyros, like Benedict Andrews and Geordie Brookman who are now forces on the Australian mainstage. A number of shows indicate future promise– Martha Lott's production of UK writer Fiona Evans's *Scarborough*, a half hour of closely observed mind games for audiences of thirteen in a room the size of – a room, as well as director Daniel Clarke's show at the Bakehouse, *After the End* by Dennis Kelly, featuring a couple (the excellent Hannah Norris and Nick Pelomis) in a bomb shelter escaping an external threat only to find a larger one within. Also, a genuine new writing talent – Caleb Lewis, author of *Songs for the Deaf*, whose whimsically mordant new monologue for Tamarama Rock Surfers, *Death in Bowengabbie* (likeably performed by Andrew Brackman at The Tuxedo Cat) has been a deserved favourite.

Murray Bramwell "Box office feed off familiarity" The Australian, March 20, 2009, p.10.

2010s Reviews

The Fringe Returns

Published: 2010-02-21 *Adelaide Fringe*

Murray Bramwell

The Fringe is back and, as someone once said, it's like a shoebox full of grasshoppers. The program numbers are up again. This time organizers are proclaiming they have broken the 500-shows-listed barrier - with 293 of them Australian premieres. Whatever all those new shows might actually mean. Some will be brilliant and we will tell our friends, some will be just good enough and maybe we won't. And some will be fascinatingly execrable and linger in the mind for days.

That is the Fringe experience - uncurated, unexpurgated, unexpected. But, if you don't want to take a chance, there are plenty of familiar warhorses returning who offer fun and no surprises. It is an extraordinary collective expression of the human impulse to perform and entertain and, for those who participate, the Fringe has an encompassing halo effect rarely apparent when small companies bravely offer their work at other times in the year.

A quick count of the listings shows cabaret with 44, theatre and circus with 75 and, while my brain fused on the final comedy total, it was around 115. This is multitudinous and, although we will have our marked out choices, dozens more will escape us until the star ratings, the buzz and the 'bugger-I missed-it's register in the mind.

Among the theatre events there are some interesting prospects. At the Fringe Factory, based this time at the Queens Theatre precinct, Adrian Mattiske's Macbeth adaptation Blood Will have Blood opens on Feb 28 and Binka Boo productions' A View of Concrete, by Victorian writer Gareth Ellis, opens on March 10. Also, Edinburgh Fringe regular Guy Masterson is back with Jo Hartstone for David Mamet's Oleanna.

The Holden Street Theatres are having a busy time with the Edinburgh transfer The Tailor of Inverness, written and performed by Matthew Zajac, and (HST Director) Martha Lott's own production Scarborough, a seaside drama by Fiona Evans. Also at Holden Street, Beckett's Rough for Theatre, Mark O'Connor's verse narrative Planting the Dunk and crazy Japanese Theatre Group Gumbo returns with JP.

At the Bakehouse, Feast director Daniel Clarke is directing After the End by Daniel Kelly, featuring Nick Pelomis and Hannah Norris it opens on Feb 28. Also cooking are Bad Company's Adventures of Jim and Jally Productions' Mediocrity. Others on my list to see include Make Me Honest Make Me Wedding Cake from IsThisYours? at The Stables, House of the Holy Afro, APA's South African music spectacular at the Masonic Centre, Hedwig and the Angry Inch at Her Majesty's and John Wood in A Stretch of the Imagination.

Once again the earth is moving at The Garden of Unearthly Delights with various venues including the Spiegeltent. It's already bopping with the Tropfest screening and early openers such as Company of Strangers, a delicious burlesque gala featuring Paul Capsis, Lady Carol and Le Gateau Chocolat. There is plenty more to come with Die Roten Punkte, the Wet Spots, and singers David Bridie, Renee Geyer, Redhead and Stephen Cummings. And for comedy – welcome back to Dave Hughes, Otis Crenshaw (with guest doppelganger Rich Hall), Charlie Pickering, Fiona O'Loughlin, Greg Fleet and Arj Barker. Also look for Mark Trenwith and Damian Calllinan at the Rhino Room, and 1000 Years of German Comedy at Caos.

Adelaide Festival and Fringe 2010

Published: 2010-02-27 *Adelaide Festival · Adelaide Fringe*

Both events are now very much underway.

The Northern Lights have been switched on and the Festival opera Le Grande Macabre, big in every sense – budget, ambition and scale – has opened. The ASO is in fine form with Ligeti's challenging but often hypnotic score and the carnivalesque nature of its boisterous storyline – part medieval morality, Spanish surrealism, Jarry's randomly absurdist Ubu and Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, it is a stew of avant garde references and turbulent comedy, grotesquery and pathos.

The central stage figure in Alfons Flores' astonishing decor – the gigantic naked woman with her often illuminated eyes and lascivious lolling tongue – is an extraordinary and relentless image. Projected upon with Bosch and Breughel-like images of figures in hell, of comet illuminations, and even, poignantly, the skeleton beneath the vast flesh, it is the constant focus of our attention. Courtesy of the revolve we are also granted every aspect (and a view of every orifice !) as this macabre opera on mortality and the body unfolds with unexpected power but also playfulness.

The singers are outstanding – counter tenor Brian Asawa as Prince GoGo, Frode Olsen and Chris Merrit, as the ageing and ramshackle Astradamors and Piet the Pot, Ning Liang as (the somewhat misogynistically portrayed) Mescalina, Susanna Andersson, marvelous as Venus and the hypermanic Gepopo and Roderick Earle, as the ultimately foiled death figure Nekrotzar. The return to the Adelaide of the iconoclastic, unpredictably theatrical La Fura del Baus has created the 2010 festival's first talking point.

The Fringe in all Directions

Published: 2010-02-27 *Adelaide Fringe*

Adelaide Fringe Theatre 2010

Previewed by Murray Bramwell

Like its dirigible-sized, tu-tu clad lunar mascot in Victoria Square, the Adelaide Fringe expands ever more. This year's model claims 705 events, the largest ever here, and second only to the Edinburgh mothership anywhere in the galaxy.

All this plenitude is a boon to Adelaide audiences, with ticket pre-sales going bananas and the throng to the Garden of Unearthly Delights already well established.

The Fringe has the best of all worlds. Those who want the known universe can find familiar faces from the comedy circuit and attend soiree performances by friends and local favourites. Others, wanting to venture where none have gone before, can seek out experiences original, exhilarating and sometimes tantalizingly awful. That's the buzz of the Fringe's uncurated bounty – it's a cultural chook raffle. And, for the artists, performers, hucksters and brave souls who are the presenters, the Fringe is the free-market at its most Darwinian. Some will clean up, some break even and others lose, not only their shirts, but perhaps a few layers of skin as well.

This is especially true of the crowded theatre program. In an average week in Adelaide we might find two, maybe three, events of interest. In three weeks the Fringe theatre listings last year numbered around 75. Now, in 2010, they exceed 120. That is a huge program and there is plenty to consider.

The international contingent is again strong with old favourites from Seattle , Theatre Simple, bringing a new show Myth Understandings (at the Odeon) and a old fave, the random scene impro 52 Pick-up. The marvelous Guy Masterson returns with his Centre for International Theatre line-up, this year at Higher Ground in Light Square. He reprises his Dylan Thomas classics Fern Hill and Under Milk Wood and brings a swag of new shows including Scara-mouche Jones, The Event, Bully, and The Sociable Plover.

Holden Street Theatres are hosting sixteen events including the UK import sponsored by HST themselves, Heroin(e) for Breakfast, a strong new work from writer/director Philip Stokes with a sharp cast and a harsh subject. Also at Holden Street – Sartre's In Camera from No Exit, Ionesco's Rhinoceros from Urban Myth and interstate shows Goat Town from Shiny Side and Tim Watts' charming multimedia Adventures of Alvin Sputnik.

There are several notable season returns to the Fringe. The first is the Flying Penguins' outstanding production of Sam Shepard's True West. With an excellent cast directed by David Mealor, it plays at AC Arts until mid-March. Also worth a visit is the droll black comedy, Death in Bowengabbbie written by Caleb Lewis and performed by Andrew Brackman at the Tuxedo Cat. It is presented by the Tamarama Rock Surfers who also have The Chronic Ills of Robert Zimmerman in season (along with NIDA: Sex Wars and others) at the Bakehouse.

Also worth checking out are Ladykillers with their on-line devised, music theatre work, Based on a True Story at the Ed Castle and Best We Forget, more zany culture commentary from the perky Isthisyours group. The prolific Accidental Productions have a bevy of works at The Stables including Krang, Almost an Evening and The Umbrella Plays, short works by Australian playwright Cerise de Gelder.

One of last year's Fringe highlights was Daniel Clarke's production of After the End by Daniel Kelly. This time, he is directing My Name is Rachel Corrie. Taken from the Writings of Rachel Corrie. Edited by Alan Rickman and Katherine Viner. It is the grim story of the young woman crushed by a bulldozer on the Gaza Strip while protesting the destruction of Palestinian homes. Performed by Hannah Norris, it promises to be a memorably serious moment amidst the Fringe carnival.

The Adelaide Review Published March, 2010. Adelaide

Adelaide Fringe 2010

Published: 2010-02-27 *Adelaide Fringe*

February 19 to March 14

Bookings : FringeTIX – 1300 FRINGE (1300 374 643)

The Fringe has been under way for a week now. The carny playground, of sideshows and spruikers, big tops and little, known as The Garden of Unearthly Delights has been going even longer. Sprawled across Rundle Park just over the road from the city's favourite café and restaurant precinct, it is again proof that the Fringe captures the whole city. Last Friday an estimated 80,000 lined the streets for the opening parade, and every night since, punters have been queuing up for shows, while others take in the strolling entertainment or the alfresco menu. The nights so far have been balmy. This is Adelaide in late summer. The fish are jumping and the cotton is high.

At the Spiegeltent (not to be confused with the Festival's Famous Spiegeltent) Fiona O'Loughlin is opening her new show, drily entitled On a Wing and a Prayer. This is her first live gig since her much-publicised onstage collapse in Brisbane, last July, on the eve of her stint on the TV ratings magnet Dancing with the Stars. Yes, she admits, she was tired, and yes, emotional. And Fiona is saying the word herself – alcoholic. She's taking the twelve steps, but also pausing for some very droll jokes along the way.

As always, her sharp, smart comedy goes where the sanctimonious fear to tread. Even without a pre-prandial double vodka, the mother of five (who can't remember their names off the top of her head) still has women in the audience in fits and the men looking around to see if it's alright to smirk. Family values get a razzing, so does being peri-menopausal. And her evocation of her Catholic clan is fond, hilarious and deliciously exaggerated.

At Light Square, on the west side of the city, a very different event is being staged. My Name is Rachel Corrie is a play compiled, by the UK actor Alan Rickman and Katherine Viner, deputy editor of The Guardian, from the notebooks and emails of a 23 year old from Olympia, Washington who went to the Gaza Strip as part of an international group protesting the forcible removal of Palestinian settlements. That she was crushed to death by an Israeli bulldozer in March 2003 is the dread fact which precedes the ninety minute performance. But it is the evocation of her life which is so dramatically startling. Admirably directed by Daniel Clarke, Hannah Norris gives a splendid account of an idealistic young woman, raised to be forthright and truth-seeking, setting off to discover the world for herself.

With Cassandra Backler's inventive décor of cardboard boxes, miniature houses and gardens, and Tonka bulldozers, the unfolding tragedy is given a tender particularity. The tone is neither shrill nor sentimental. This is because Rachel Corrie's own writing is unexpectedly articulate and memorable, as are the letters from her parents. It is no wonder Alan Rickman, reading excerpts of her diaries in The Guardian sensed their dramatic potential. And this production, with its poise, its restraint and its theatrical invention, has found their measure.

The link between the Adelaide Fringe and the Edinburgh original has always been strong and 2010 marks fifty years since the program was first introduced as doppelganger, or rambunctious sibling, to the Adelaide Festival itself. This year's contingent from the UK is a lively one. Holden Street Theatres now sponsor an event from Edinburgh as part of their schedule and this time the choice is Heroin(e) for Breakfast, a trainspotting study of a ménage a needle, written and directed by Philip Stokes for Horizon Arts in Leeds.

Using the delectable conceit of heroin arriving at the door in the form of a platinum blonde in a white Marilyn skirt, the seduction to the lower depths begins, as two sisters and their cocksure lover gradually discover they don't control the game. Overwrought, at times overwritten, but also strongly etched – this play is a view of not-so-cool Britannia. Not so much look back, but look up your arm, in anger.

Actor, director, and Edinburgh impresario Guy Masterson returns with a strong list of productions at Higher Ground, in Light Square alongside AC Arts and the Shimmering West venue. Masterson's wonderful turn (alongside the able Ronnie Toms) as the twitching birdwatcher in Tim Whitnall's grimly comic The Sociable Plover, is eighty minutes of sheer theatrical pleasure. In quite a different key, David Calvitto's performance of New York playwright, John Clancy's monologue, The Event, is a witty introspection on the nature of performance – the actor, the audience, the conventions, and the paradox of rehearsed spontaneity. The performer talks about his predicament – and about the way we also act and silently watch in the wider world. His show is a bit "meta", "David" observes satirically. It is also thought provoking and surprisingly diverting.

Murray Bramwell

The Australian published February 25, 2010.

The Fringe program has been living up to expectations

Published: 2010-02-28 *Adelaide Fringe*

Not to be missed are - (I don't really approve of stars but life is short in March at Festival and Fringe time) My Name is Rachel Corrie (Five stars) The Sociable Plover (Four stars) The Event (Four stars) Death in Bowengabbie (Four stars) Fiona O'Loughlin (Four stars) Heroin(e) for Breakfast (Four stars)

Well worth seeing 3xperimentia: Live Cut (Three and a half stars) Based upon a True Story (Ladykillers) (three and a half) Adventures of Alvin Sputnik (three and a half) A Tiny Chorus (Elbow Room) (three stars)

Watch out for This Week The Accidental Productions season at The Stables The Wau Wau Sisters Last Supper (Garden of Unearthly Delights) In Remembrance (of) a small death (five.point.one) True West (Flying Penguins' reprise of an outstanding production – (see review)

A World of Difference

Published: 2010-03-01 *WOMADelaide*

A World of Difference

Womadelaide 2010 Botanic Park March 5-8.

Murray Bramwell previews highlights from next month's Womadelaide

To mark the new decade, and fifty years of the Adelaide Festival, Womadelaide 2010 is bigger than ever. Stretched to a fourth day, it now finishes on the night of the March Monday holiday. The program has added eight more acts, four international, four Australian, and claims performances from more than 500 artists from 27 countries.

Womadelaide remains one of South Australia's most successful major events. Even as the state's general claim to cultural pre-eminence comes under closer scrutiny and the Festival itself is being shadowed – and overshadowed – by Melbourne, Sydney and even Perth, Womad continues to flourish. With access to the centrally located Botanic Park and production values established when it was first introduced as a Festival event back in 1992, it has enjoyed the Premier's particular patronage and support – enabling it to move to an annual cycle in 2003 and sign long term agreements to fend off the predations of other cities keen to grab a piece of world action.

There is something about Womad's agreeable mix of music and dance, wine and food, and family-friendly, gentle conviviality which recalls that Don Dunstan "Athens of the South" ambience which is both Adelaide legend and Adelaide fact. On the crowded, often unseemly, national stage where cities and states jostle for cultural distinction, Womadelaide, now in its fourteenth incarnation, is still seen as a good reason for people to jump on a plane, or rev up the Kombi, and come and join in.

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And for those who want their Cuban straight from the Social Club – then there is virtuoso guitarist, Eliades Ochoa, stalwart of the Buena Vista Social Club, revived and celebrated as a result of Ry Cooder's tribute to the golden age of Havana music. Ochoa has numerous solo albums but you also can't go past the live Carnegie Hall double CD (Nonesuch) of the legendary Buena Vistas.

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Besh o DroM is said to translate from Hungarian as "to ride the road, just like wild horses." Certainly their gypsy fusion sound which traverses Transylvania and Lebanon is a full tilt experience. Formed in Budapest in 1999 they may play like wild horses but their precison is strictly equestrian. I have been listening to the soundtrack album *Gyi !* that gets more frenetically interesting every time I play it.

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introduced the sound of the sitar to Western ears. Even as every Sixties record collection included a copy of the Beatles' *Sgt Pepper* and *Revolver* so the Fontana LP of Ravi Shankar's *Portrait of Genius* was also to be found. Shankar has a huge output – including collaborations with Yehudi Menuhin and film soundtracks. Sony has a double CD in its *Essential* series. *Full Circle*, a live set from Carnegie Hall in 2000 (Angel) is one of the most recent and it sounds majestic. In his 90th year, Ravi Shankar's Womad performance, with his daughter Anoushka, will be unforgettable.

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The Adelaide Review, March 2010.

A World of Difference

Published: 2010-03-02 *WOMADelaide*

Womadelaide 2010 Botanic Park March 5-8.

Murray Bramwell previews highlights from this week's Womadelaide

To mark the new decade, and fifty years of the Adelaide Festival, Womadelaide 2010 is bigger than ever. Stretched to a fourth day, it now finishes on the night of the March Monday holiday. The program has added eight more acts, four international, four Australian, and claims performances from more than 500 artists from 27 countries.

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Extended version of article in The Adelaide Review, March, 2010

Adelaide Festival Theatre

Published: 2010-03-02 *Adelaide Festival*

The Life and Death of King John by William Shakespeare The Eleventh Hour Queen's Theatre, Adelaide. February 25. Tickets $25 - $49. Bookings BASS 131 246 or adelaidefestival.com.au Until March 7.

Vs Macbeth by William Shakespeare The Border Project and Sydney theatre Company Odeon Theatre, Adelaide. February 27. Tickets $16 -$39. Bookings BASS 131 246 Until March 6. Wharf 2 season opens March 20

Even though, in its fiftieth year, the Adelaide Festival's theatre program is a diminished one, it has still made room for two of the Bard. Both are re-readings and deconstructions, one is perhaps Shakespeare's least-known play, the other among his most familiar.

The Life and Death of King John, from the Melbourne company, The Eleventh Hour, is the work of two Williams. Dramaturg William Henderson, with director Anne Thompson and an able cast, has devised a framework for the performance which is a play in itself.

It is Armistice Day, 1918 and led by their mortally wounded captain, four blinded and gas-affected soldiers, three nurses and a padre take shelter in a ruined barn awaiting orders on the cease-fire. They have been rehearsing a play, King John, about a kingdom in anarchy, a disputed monarchy, the capture of a young heir and the duplicitous role of cardinals. It is about tactical misjudgments and futile deaths – all linking events of the 13th century with the divisions and torments of World War One.

With a startling, large-as-life set, in the cavernous Queen's Theatre, complete with stacks of barrels, wagons and drays, Anne Thompson creates a microcosm of the chequered history of Europe, as well as of the English, Scots and Irish . The players' thick accents cross all classes and regions, but the set pieces from Shakespeare's play, even if little known, are timelessly mythic in their implication – Lady Constance (Jane Nolan) bewailing her dead son Arthur, the henchman Hubert (Michaela Cantwell) vexed by his cruel orders to kill him, and the King (the excellent David Tredinnick) regretful for having given them. This is an ambitious, sometimes perplexing, but also rewarding production.

It is the legend (and also a documented fact) of "the Scottish play" that it is unlucky, and in their lively, witty, accident-prone version, the Border Project have built in an array of miscues, prop failures, rigging collapses and costume malfunctions, to remind us that Macbeth's own ruin is also a result of miscalculations, misreadings and failures of nerve.

Skilfully avoiding mere comic undercutting of the narrative, the incipient calamities give the play an edge, and a sense of doom, that renders Macbeth and his scheming Lady (the outstanding Cameron Goodall and Amber McMahon) almost pitiful in their wickedness. Sam Haren's inventive direction uses paintball guns for executions, green exit lights for candles and the set itself as the theatre of war. Energised by David Heinrich's music and sound, this is an intelligent, affecting, and accessible Macbeth that hardly puts a foot wrong.

Murray Bramwell

Adelaide Festival Theatre

Published: 2010-03-18 *Adelaide Festival*

The Sound and the Fury (April Seventh, 1928) Text by William Faulkner Elevator Repair Service Dunstan Theatre, Adelaide Festival Centre . March 11, 2010

Ngurrumilmarrmiriyu (Wrong Skin) Written by Nigel Jamieson in association with Joshua Bond, the community and elders of Elcho Island and The Chooky Dancers. Her Majesty's Theatre, Adelaide. March 12, 2010

The American novelist William Faulkner took the title of his 1929 masterwork from Shakespeare's Macbeth. "A tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." The inventive, Brooklyn-based, Elevator Repair Service has taken the first section of Faulkner's complex text and given it such a lift that it signifies much - and makes mesmerizing theatre as well.

Divided into four , the novel has different narrations. Three of them, are told by brothers - Benjy, Quentin and Jason Compson, all from a Mississippi landed dynasty now seen (like the American South itself, in Faulkner's view) in racist decline. This production uses only Benjy's tale which prefigures the dysfunctional family's tragedy and, since he is a mentally disabled mute, it is a tangled telling. Events are out of sequence, sensations are mixed with factual details, conversations are reported but not understood.

Directed by John Collins, the accomplished actors of Elevator Repair Service take this torrent of poetic consciousness and present it, not as naturalistic dialogue, but as read-aloud text - complete with "Mother said", "Caddy said" etc - establishing a dissociated but lilting cadence which carries the story (and the book it is being read from) from player to player, adding layers of implication and perspective as roles are shared and reinterpreted.

The realist shabby domestic décor is counterpointed by projections of text on the walls, intermittent bursts of absurdist hoe-down choreography and a continuous flow of sound, static and half-heard commentary from the large parlour radio. In making the familiar strange and remembered emotion freshly vivid, this remarkable production not only revives a marvelous text but also renews our sense of theatrical possibility.

The story of The Chooky Dancers from Yolngu country in Elcho Island off North East Arnhem Land is an inspiring one. Putting their zany interpretation of Zorba's Dance on YouTube to the delight of millions of viewers, brilliantly reminded us, particularly here in Australia, that remote is not remote in the old way any more. Mobile phones and the internet are transforming culture everywhere.

Building on these contrasts, writer and director Nigel Jamieson mixes video, techno and reruns of YouTube, alongside traditional dancing and singing, to tell a fragmented version of Wrong Skin – two young lovers caught in Romeo and Juliet style conflict because their clan and kin lines forbid their relationship.

While this commendable production has been a huge venture for all concerned, its ambitions are greater than the capacities of the performers and its tragic theme is curiously at odds with the exuberance and energies of the Chooky Dancers and the cultural adventure they themselves have created. While not minimizing the challenges facing indigenous communities, perhaps, for once, the real story here is one called Right Skin.

Murray Bramwell

Published in abridged form as "Tangled narratives of tragedy and hope" The Australian , March 15, 2010, p. 17.

Fringe-worthy fun that's passing strange

Published: 2011-02-27 *Adelaide Fringe*

February 25 Adelaide

2011 Adelaide Fringe February 18 – March 13 Bookings : FringeTIX – 1300 FRINGE (1300 374 643)

The 2011 Adelaide Fringe program is again bulging with events – not quite 200 in cabaret and theatre, and more than 200 comedy acts - some 750 in all.

The UK theatre invasion has begun winningly at Holden Street Theatres with *Bound*, Bear Trap Theatre's saga of a North Sea fishing boat. Written by Jesse Briton, and performed with flair by a young ensemble, it memorably trawls the destinies of six men at the edge of the world. Also, back from Edinburgh, is Fringe favourite, director and performer, Guy Masterson with a string of works including *Phoenix Rising*, a portrait of DH Lawrence, and the satiric political dissertation, *American Poodle*.

Among the local theatre offerings, Brink Productions' *Skip Miller's Hit Songs* (at theOdeon) tells the story of an Australian photojournalist returning home from war-torn Africa with, not just pictures for an exhibition, but some troubling after-images as well. Director Chris Drummond has assembled a handsome stage, stylishly lit, with video projections on Wendy Todd's widescreen set. The performances are sincere, but Sean Riley's text, despite its disturbing themes of genocide and trauma, is not as dramatically fresh and engaging as some of his excellent previous work.

Adelaide's East End Rundle Park has again transformed into the Garden of Unearthly Delights, a carnival precinct for the strange, weird and highly amusing. At the Spiegeltent, the hyperkinetic burlesque squad from *Cantina* explore the fine line between ecstacy and excruciation with bone crunching acrobatics and whimsical ukeleles while the eloquently wordless prankster, Sam Wills, aka *The Boy with Tape on his Face,* (Bosco Theatre) has brought a whole new cardboard box of tricks to audiences only too willing to be ordered into action making flamenco with clacking false teeth, fabricating bullfights, dancing to the tune of the Sugar Plum Fairy and bursting 99 red balloons.

We are often aware of what gets lost in translation but Stevl Shefn and his assistant Fatima (Stephen Sheehan and Emma Beech at the Campanile) remind us what can be found. In their zany turn (which is somewhere on the spectrum between Borat and Paul Livingston's immortal Flacco), the disinhibited Mr Shefn's unfathomable gibberish is rendered into English by the primly deadpan Fatima - as he moves confidently and hilariously from gaffe to absurdity and beyond.

Also passing strange – and well worth it - is Asher Treleaven. Behind his *Secret Door* (at La Cascadeur) he not only uses his disconcerting comedy to dismantle assumptions about gender, sex and social aggression, he reminds us what the surrealist adventure of the Fringe is all about. With his foppish suit and manic hair, he could be a young postmodern Barry Humphries.

Murray Bramwell

"Fringe-worthy fun that's passing strange", The Australian, February 25, p.17.

City with the Fringe comes out on top

Published: 2011-03-12 *Adelaide Fringe*

Adelaide 2011 Adelaide Fringe February 18 – March 13

After more than three frenetic weeks of activity the Adelaide Fringe has come to a close, leaving the hundreds of artists and supporters to reflect on their fortunes, both creative and financial. With an uncurated smorgasbord of 759 events (405 of them Australian premieres) audiences have had a busy job finding the truffles. According to Fringe Director Greg Clarke, 2011 has even surpassed last year's box office total of 301,800 tickets sold. Many of those have been for familiar crowd favourites, especially the army of stand-up comedians which uses the Adelaide Fringe as springboard for the Melbourne Comedy Festival which begins in two weeks' time.

But Fringe audiences have also shown a willingness to sample the range of new and innovative cabaret and theatre which is especially to be welcomed in uncertain times. It's always tough making independent theatre but, with rising costs and competition from other forms of entertainment, it's getting even tougher. The Fringe, at least, brings safety in numbers and a collective energy which exhilarates both performers and audiences – even if they are in a 21 day Darwinian struggle for attention.

Among those deserving notice was You're Not Like the Other Girls Chrissy, UK writer/performer Caroline Horton's wry and moving tribute to her French grandmother, Christiane and her determined constancy, waiting for her English fiancé, missing during World War II. One of Guy Masterson's CIT contingent from the Edinburgh Fringe, Paul Slack also presented a dramatized biography, Phoenix Rising, based on the early life (the Sons and Lovers phase) of the now much neglected novelist DH Lawrence. Other CIT productions of note included The Six Sided Man, a two-hander based on Luke Rhineharts' cult novel The Dice Man and Masterson's own bravura Shylock.

Amongst the physical theatre, the Dutch trio Theatergroep WAK provided a season of intriguing fun at the Garden of Unearthly Delights with their wordless, often difficult, antics in Nothing is Really Difficult, performed entirely inside a large wooden container. And for something completely conceptual, the four women of Brown Council deconstructed what makes us laugh in A Comedy, which, in the spirit of UK anti-theatre company Forced Entertainment, discomforted its compliant audience but gave rather too little in return.

And among local fare, as part of Accidental Productions' lively season at City Soul, emerging director Nescha Jelk's revival of Ionesco's disturbing absurdist play The Lesson, featuring excellent performances from Guy O'Grady and Elizabeth Hay, offered a glimpse of the Fringe at its creative best - and of the next wave of artists for whom this festival is a valuable opportunity to make their mark.

Murray Bramwell

"City with the Fringe comes out on top" The Australian, March 14, p.17

Womad Earth Station

Published: 2011-11-06 *WOMADelaide*

Adelaide October 24

Womad Earth Station Long Gully, Belair National Park, Adelaide October 21-23.

When, back in March 1992, Adelaide Festival director Rob Brookman was launching his first ever Womad event, he had intended that it be held in Belair National Park in the Adelaide Hills. Severe seasonal fire danger alerts put paid to that plan and, at the last minute, everything re-located to Botanic Park in the CBD where Womadelaide has been a great biennial, and now annual, success for not quite 20 years.

But now, with this newest spin-off project, Womad Earth Station, a mix of the now-familiar music, installations and markets format with a ramped-up series of forums featuring more than forty expert speakers on climate change and environmental sustainability, the switch from autumn to spring has meant that the original idea of a festival in the Belair Park has finally been realized.

It meant more logistics – transport in by train for many, and then shuttle buses into the park itself – but the Womad faithful got with the program and, as always, the festival infrastructure and design was first-rate.

In order to re-focus on discussion and reflection, director Ian Scobie deliberately scheduled a smaller music program, but loaded it with excellent selections nonetheless. Australian performers included Emma Donovan and Pitjantjatjara man Frank Yamma with David Bridie, Vika and Linda Bull, stylish vocalist Paris Wells, and inventive jazz outfit, The Catholics, featuring saxophonist Sandy Evans and trombone player James Greening.

The Saturday line-up was weakened by the cancellation of festival drawcard, the Malian kora master, Toumani Diabate, delayed with visa problems in Paris. But Sunday's listings more than compensated - Rickie Lee Jones performing classics like Last Chance Texaco as well as new songs Bonfires and Wild Girl, Chinese musician Wu Man playing her lute-like pipa and, closing the final night, a beautifully lucid sixty minute piano reverie from Abdullah Ibrahim.

But the headline group of the festival was the Kronos Quartet – playing an afternoon set of works ranging from Sigur Ros and Omar Souleyman to Terry Riley's The Cusp of Magic. Then, on the final night, led by David Harrington, Kronos played a range of international works collectively entitled A Meditation on Earth, interspersed with sage quotations (read by John Gaden and Pamela Rabe) from astronauts to Chekhov, Edison to Einstein.

The true highlight, however, was on the first night when, in the bushland setting, Kronos, assisted by the Adelaide Chamber Singers, performed Terry Riley's Sun Rings, a 90 minute tribute to NASA scientist Don Gurnett and the deep space recordings taken by the Voyager and Galileo missions. This splendid blend of music and visionary science memorably captured the aspirations of the festival and Womad Earth Station gave us something seriously cosmic to tune in to.

Murray Bramwell

Published as "Hills come alive with cosmic vibrations" The Australian, October 25, 2011, p.17.

Malmo

Published: 2012-03-06 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

February 29, 2012 Adelaide Festival

Malmo Torque Show Presented by Vitalstatistix Theatre Company in association with Adelaide Festival Waterside, Port Adelaide. February 28. Tickets : $ 25 - $35 Bookings: BASS 131 246, adelaidefestival.com.au Until March 4.

“This is not a house, it’s a machine for living” the bright young couple exults, “It is a 3D mirror of who you are.” Malmo, a dance theatre work devised by performers Vincent Crowley and Ingrid Weisfelt, along with director Ross Ganf, takes a long, often comical look at the social ritual of home renovation.

The audience is in promenade in the vast space of the Waterside Workers Hall. Taking up and putting down our little stools, we are led through imaginary rooms as our eager hosts – he in waistcoat and black slacks, she with neck scarf, striped top and mustard trousers – elaborate feverishly on the particulars of their home creation.

To illustrate their comments we are referred to our individually supplied copies of Malmo, a droll, wickedly concocted satiric send-up of any number of lifestyle and architectural magazines, which has chosen their house for its monthly feature. The design accents are Scandinavian, of course, and evoke the familiar consumer paradise of the flat pack and the Allen key, but as they rhapsodise fatuously about “rooms for the imagination” we realize they really believe their own mantra that “your house says - Me Me Me.”

Interspersed with the cheeky send-up of interior narcissism, the performers lucidly choreograph their changing moods – from the breezy harmony of their project-based universe-of-two to their rapidly deteriorating emotional decline as the renovation becomes mired in disagreement and falling morale. As Nick Roux’s brooding, inventive sound design rumbles beneath us, the dancers lying on the floor entwine as angry lovers and unquiet sleepers, and their child joins them in the roiling agitation. It is a powerful, disconcerting and recognizable image and memorably highlights what the production has to say about how easily we can get lost in the details and the clichés of domestic nirvana. But its impact is not sustained and developed. Director Ross Ganf and his collaborators need to craft a greater fluency in their narrative – or at least find how to move more emphatically from their satiric intentions to the stronger emotional kick.

Some of the segments could be dispensed with (including, perhaps, the final one) and the excellent dance elements highlighted more. The audience logistics also need simplifying - we will be moved more, if we are moved about less. This is a work of originality and promise, an intriguing series of entertaining set pieces. But, in its present form, Malmo falls gallantly short of its own grand design.

Murray Bramwell

“Renovators’ delight doesn’t quite bring down the house” The Australian, March 1, 2012, p.15.

The Ham Funeral

Published: 2012-03-06 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

March 1 , 2012 Adelaide Festival Theatre

The Ham Funeral by Patrick White State Theatre Company Odeon Theatre, Queen Street February 27. Tickets $ 25 - $ 59 Bookings : BASS 131 246 or Adelaidefestival.com.au Until March 18

For his 2012 Festival production, State Theatre's departing artistic director, Adam Cook has shown an astute sense of occasion. Not only is this year the centenary of Patrick White's birth but it is just over fifty years since the programming of The Ham Funeral was infamously rejected by the board of the 1962 Adelaide Festival. It was quickly taken up by the Adelaide Theatre Guild for a season in November 1961 but, for the infuriated playwright and the tattered reputation of the city, the damage was done.

Written in 1947 and inspired in part by the William Dobell painting The Dead Landlord, the play draws on White's own experiences in digs in London during the grim austerity of the post-war period. His play is set in a "great, damp, crumbling house" and features the progress of a Young Man, a poet, (Luke Clayson) moving from innocence to experience as he descends the stage from the mezzanine of romantic idealism to the basement world of appetite and the id. There the soon-to-expire Will Lusty and his exuberantly libidinous wife can be found. There is a boisterous vulgarity in their interaction which accelerates in Act Two as the mourners arrive to eat ham and drink beer in the parlour.

In this production Cook and designer Ailsa Paterson have created a strong visual impact with the seedy two storey tenement daubed in blobs and huge stripes of black and shades of grey. The opening scene with Jonathan Mill as Will and Amanda Muggleton, excellent as the well-named Mrs Lusty, reinforces the drabness of life where every part of the décor, including the food, is ashen grey.

But these strengths are undermined - by the use of London accents, when sounding like a "wedge of black (Australian) cockatoos" would have worked better - and, much more significantly, by the extravagance of the costuming. First, there are the Knockabout Ladies (played with vaudeville gusto by Jacqy Phillips and Geoff Revell) and then the outlandish black and spangled clown outfits of the Relatives revealed at the beginning of Act Two.

Dressing these screeching visitors like escapees from The Dark Crystal or Tim Burton's Alice simply does not serve the puritanical, Dickensian parsimony of the scene. The costumes are brilliantly imagined and constructed but they belong in another play. They come close to toppling White's already over-contrived symbolic structure and make the earthy poignancy of Muggleton's Mrs Lusty harder to register. This Ham Funeral, in many ways more lucid and accessible than previous productions is, unfortunately, over-dressed for the occasion.

Murray Bramwell

"Just too dressed up for austerity Britain" The Australian, March2, 2012, p.17.

Multiple perspectives on feeling and falling

Published: 2012-03-06 *Adelaide Fringe*

March 3, 2012

Adelaide Fringe 2012

Adelaide Fringe Bookings : FringeTix, 1300 FRINGE February 24 – March 18

It is an understatement to say the Adelaide Fringe is thriving, its continued expansion is simply extraordinary. Last year's program set new records with 729 listed events, and now, in 2012, it has ramped up to 923. In these cautious, even gloomy times, nothing, it seems, is deterring artists – aspiring and established – from putting on a show.

Celebrating ten years of operation, the Garden of Unearthly Delights , in Rundle Park close to Adelaide's popular East End eateries, is a favourite focal point for a cluster of venues featuring comedy, cabaret, circus and music. In the first sweltering Adelaide nights of their short season intrepid performance troupe Cantina packed out the Vagabond stage with their gamey stew of acrobatics, contortion and tightwire acts. Led by the dexterous Chelsea McGuffin and saturnine rope artist Mozes, the group artfully blends music hall crooning, eye popping physical precision and a dark subtext of sex and danger.

Bubbling with energy and virtuosity is Soap: the Show – seven performers, including operatic diva Patricia Holtzman, emerge from a bevy of bathtubs for a non-stop spectacle of juggling, bodyflips, aerial spins, water jokes, operatic solos and, using lyrics from Bobby Darin's Splish Splash, musical parodies of Handel, Beethoven and Zorba's Dance. Directed by Markus Pabst and Maximilian Rambaek, Soap is good clean burlesque.

Also at the Garden for the Fringe season is the sharp-witted eccentric Sam Simmonds with About the Weather, his cleverly constructed free-associating monologue about being incapable of small talk and having an obsessive compulsion for remembering seventies jingles. It is status anxiety for slackers, and, when he bursts into his version of the Gillette commercial, neurotically funny.

Holden Street Theatres, located near Hindmarsh Stadium, are again presenting a raft of events. UK group The Terrible Infants use puppetry and music to tell guignol tales of little Beatrice whose hair becomes a beehive and Thingummyboy who is so overlooked he disappears from view. It is stylish clever comedy, musically droll, and genuinely plays to all ages.

And chosen by Holden Street's Martha Lott as the best of Edinburgh Fringe 2011 is Scottish company Tumult in the Clouds with two shows, Fleeto and Wee Andy. Fleeto, Glasgow slang for street gang, is a turbulent account of a knife crime committed by Mackie (Jordan McCurragh), a young kid drawn into the comradeship of a crew by the vengeful Kenzie (Neil Leiper).

Written by Paddy Cunneen (and crisply directed by Andy Clark) it is verbally ferocious but with an almost classical cadence, as it echoes Homeric situations – such as when Mackie contrives to meet the mother of his victim, which the playwright compares to Priam recovering the body of Hector. In fine Brechtian fashion, this outstanding play tells its story from multiple perspectives and offers powerful insight into what often seems like unfathomable cruelty.

XXXO, at the XSpace, Adelaide College of the Arts, is not too deep for tears – in fact it's about crying out loud. Using laptops and projection screens, Belgian actors Nathalie Marie Verbeke and Charlotte De Bruyne , tearfully recreate scenes from Titanic and Boyz in the Hood, Bambi and Sex in the City. They rub onion on their eyes and watch the saddest puppy on YouTube. But this is not just a crying game, as they astutely examine whether we really know any more the difference between mawkish sentiment and real feeling.

Murray Bramwell

Published in slightly abridged form as "Multiple perspectives on feeling and falling" The Australian, March 5, 2012, p.15.

School Dance

Published: 2012-03-13 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

By Matthew Whittet Windmill Theatre in association with Adelaide Festival The Space, Adelaide Festival Centre . March 6. Tickets : $ 20 - $30 Bookings: BASS 131 246, adelaidefestival.com.au Until March 10.

The school dance is a big deal – and an ordeal - if you are not numbered among the anointed popular. Windmill's captivating new work not only explores the status anxiety of teenagers, it takes them through a hole in the fabric of time to make things right. School nerds Matthew, Luke and Jonathan (Matthew Whittet, Luke Smiles and Jonathan Oxlade) join forces to stare down school bully Derek Sturges (the imposing bodybuilder Jim Rose) and Matthew even gets the girl (played, in multiple cameos, by the hilarious Amber McMahon.)

Whittet's zany script features 80s pop culture and power ballads, mogwais, smurfs and my little pony. It is sharp, warmly funny, and touchingly well-observed. Tightly directed by Rosemary Myers, with inventive, off-beat design by Oxlade and great sounds from Smiles, Windmill has all bases covered. Open-hearted and quick on its feet, School Dance is a Festival hit.

Murray Bramwell

The Australian, Out and About (brief), Friday March 16, 2012.

Hard to be a God

Published: 2012-03-13 *Adelaide Festival*

March 8, 2012 Adelaide Festival Theatre

Hard to be a God Directed by Kornel Mundruczo Old Clipsal Site, Bowden March 8. Tickets $ 30 - $ 69 Bookings : BASS 131 246 or Adelaidefestival.com.au Until March 14

Hard to be a God, the much- awaited festival production by Hungarian director Kornel Mundruczo and his ensemble, takes its name from a 1964 sci-fi novel by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky. In the novel, a traveller from the future planet Earth, studies an alien planet of humans not yet evolved as far as he is. He is instructed that whatever he sees, he must not interfere, but remain dispassionate, as evolution is gradual and must be allowed to run its course.

This injunction is sorely tested in the cavernous space of the former Clipsal factory where the performance takes place. Directly in front of the audience a huge semi-trailer is parked, its canvas side flaps pulled back, to reveal a detailed reconstruction of a denim clothing sweatshop. To our left, at right angles, is a second truck canopy, the interior of which is only ever revealed by video-feed screened on its outer wall.

In no time we discover that the truck is carrying three young Hungarian women, captive to brothel mistress Mammy Blue (Annamaria Lang) but about to suffer a worse fate from the psychopathic political extremist Karoly (Roland Raba) and the foul sado-porn director Omar (Laszlo Katona). The production moves convulsively- from naturalistic scenes such as the girls undergoing medical checks from the sympathetic doctor (Zsolt Nagy) one minute, bursting into a chirpy ensemble pop song the next, and then hauled into the video studio for repulsive humiliation and physical abuse.

Mundruczo, also a film director, uses extreme schlock and awe techniques with what he calls hyper-realism - daubed fake blood, appliqué burn wounds - all delivered in hand-held video close-up. It is stagey, but the cruelty is palpable and disturbing. Late in the proceedings, the time-travelling infiltrator comes out to the audience for a volunteer to replace the third young woman about to be violated by the beastly henchmen (including the aptly named Attila, sporting, for a local name-check, a Clipsal 500 shirt). Not surprisingly, none of us moves a muscle.

This is the perennial question asked in the theatre since Euripides' Medea, when she announces her murderous intention and neither chorus nor audience intervenes. In this case, it's not only hard to be a god, it's pretty hard to be in the audience. At one point, during a scene of grinding copulation, Mammy Blue says : "Jeez this is horrible". You can't help but agree. This production is a stylistic goulash, leaping from extremes of unpleasantness, to musical flippancy to contrived moral dilemma - so that it all starts to cancel itself out. It certainly leaves us in consternation for its victims, but uses good old exploitation to get us there.

Murray Bramwell

"It's hard to be a member of the audience for this science fiction shlock and awe" The Australian, March 13, 2012, p.17

The Caretaker

Published: 2012-03-13 *Adelaide Festival*

March 10 , 2012 Adelaide Festival Theatre

The Caretaker by Harold Pinter A Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse production in association with the Adelaide Festival, Adelaide Festival Centre and Theatre Royal Bath Her Majesty's Theatre, Adelaide March 10. Tickets $ 30 - $ 119 Bookings : BASS 131 246/ adelaidefestival.com.au Until March 23.

Harold Pinter once said : "I can sum up none of my plays, I can describe none of them, except to say: That is what happened. That is what they said. That is what they did." In April 1960, when The Caretaker was first performed, such precise detailing of what was said and done seemed enigmatic, incomplete – and as the writer Martin Esslin famously called it: absurd. Fifty years on, we can see how dramatically Pinter has altered our view of reality.

The Caretaker has a defined setting- London, and begins when someone called Aston offers a disheveled tramp named Davies temporary digs in a rundown flat owned by Aston's brother Mick. The subsequent events all take place in the confines of the house as we watch, like some kind of behavioral experiment, three men jostle for psychological and territorial ascendancy in a situation where information is power and menace is a weapon.

In this Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse production, astutely lit by Colin Grenfell, designer Eileen Diss has created a cluttered, bed-sit décor of discarded furniture, electrical appliances, and other assorted junk. There is a grimy skylight and side window and at the back, a single door – a famous Pinter door which, every time it opens, threatens disruption and unpredictable change.

Director Christopher Morahan highlights the mercurial nature of those changes, including the dark, reticulating humour in Pinter's text, and nowhere is this more evident than in Jonathan Pryce's outstanding performance as Davies.

Bringing an artfully dodging Welsh accent to Pinter's expertly cadenced dialogue, Pryce is dazzling to watch as Davies cons, connives, wheedles and bullies his way into what he thinks will be a situation to his advantage. When Aston gives him much-needed shoes he rebukes him that the laces don't match, when the sinister Mick arrives, he calculates to alienate him from his brother. He snores, farts and postures, confident that he is going to become the tenement caretaker – since, after all, both brothers separately offer him the job. But typically, like all self-serving imposters, he overplays his hand, especially in Pinter's world where you can never know who holds the trump.

As the psychologically damaged Aston, Alan Cox gradually establishes the steady resolve of the character and his long monologue describing his traumatic electro-shock treatment is strongly delivered. But, in the crucial role as Mick, Alex Hassell, lacks the bite and menace needed to unnerve Davies - and the audience as well. Those sudden contradictions, the game-changing shifts from smarmy politeness to cold fury, even the famous black-out scene where he hounds Davies with the vacuum cleaner, seem like opportunities lost.

Murray Bramwell

"A world of pain in one room" The Australian, March 12, 2012, p.14.

WOMADelaide – 20 Years in the World

Published: 2012-03-16 *WOMADelaide*

March 9, 2012

WOMADelaide – 20 Years in the World

As Adelaide's most cherished musical festival celebrates a major milestone it is timely to consider just how far it has come since 1992 when that strange acronym was first welded on to our city's name - and WOMADelaide arrived. Rob Brookman had programmed this weekend of something called 'world music' as part of his Adelaide Festival, and he (and Administrator Ian Scobie) negotiated with UK Director Thomas Brooman to bring together a range of artists few of us had ever heard of, but were soon to be amazed by.

Driven by singer Peter Gabriel's Real World record label the fledgling idea of WOMAD – the World of Music, Arts and Dance – took particular hold in Adelaide's Botanic Park where it has flourished ever since. And when we revisit the 1992 line-up it is not hard to see why it has been so providential – the Afrobeat showbands of Senegalese singer Youssou N'Dour, and Tanzanian activist Remmy Ongala reminded us that electric rock music was not merely a Western style but a global phenomenon, while Indian violinist Dr L Subramaniam, vocal stylist Sheila Chandra, the haunting Trio Bulgarka and eclectic electronica exponents the Afro Celt Sound System - all variously opened the ears and minds of the delighted audience.

The unexpected highlight, though, was the entrancing Qawwali vocals of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan and his fellow Pakistani musicians. Performing until past midnight on a balmy night under an open Adelaide sky, the ensemble's intricately mesmerising vocals - and the connection they made with an audience, for the most part unfamiliar with this ecstatic music form - came to epitomise the WOMADelaide experience.

Even though the 1992 audience was modest in number and the program small compared to the current format, many key elements were established at that first gathering. Botanic Park itself instantly became an essential ingredient, as has the layout of the stages and the excellent production values they continue to maintain. WOMADelaide has morphed and mutated in many ways over 20 years, but it has also maintained seamless continuities. It is the familiarity of its rituals and protocols which has meant a high percentage of the audience have attended year after year - filing through the gates and instantly resuming that collective spirit of affable curiosity and openness to new cultural experiences.

WOMADelaide , with its orderly, self-regulating ambience, is like an exhilarating social experiment where friends meet and picnic under the Moreton Bay figs , the weary over-worked take a relaxing deep breath, and parents and their kids feel free and safe to roam and have fun. And, of course, those who were young children in the 90s are now part of that evolving generation who have supported the new sounds and directions of a myriad of WOMAD's DJs, dubsters and assorted other sonic pioneers.

The WOMADelaide audience is unique in its inclusive benevolence and its willingness to explore each new program in all its facets. There is support for the social issues that are part of the festival's charter – whether for AIDS awareness in the early years, gender and racial equality or, most recently (particularly with its satellite festival, WOMAD Earth Station) resource sustainability and environmental action on climate change. In its cultural programming WOMADelaide has been an avid supporter of Aboriginal rights (and rites) and featured numerous musical talents from Jimmy Little to Tiddas to this year's return of the Pigram Brothers.

2012 brings yet another intriguing line-up – the welcome return of Baaba Maal, a showcase for the inventive trio Dirty Three and the haunting voice of the extraordinary Gurrumul. WOMADelaide Director Ian Scobie announced that Youssou N'Dour can't attend this anniversary year because he is preparing his campaign to run for President of Senegal. What an amazing thought. And it tells us so much about the synergy between culture and political and social change – that, from the little green shoots of music, all manner of big things grow.

Murray Bramwell

Published in WOMADelaide 2012, Official Souvenir Guide Celebrating 20 years. pp. 30-1.

Capacity crowd gathers to celebrate a world of diversity

Published: 2012-03-16 *WOMADelaide*

March 13, 2012

Adelaide Festival 2012

WOMADelaide 2012 Botanic Park, Adelaide March 9 – 12.

It is now twenty years since the first WOMAD, scheduled as part of the 1992 Adelaide Festival, introduced world music to Australian audiences. The original program lineup was modest in number but not in stature – introducing, among others, Senegalese singer Youssou N'Dour, violinist Dr L. Subramaniam, and, memorably, the charismatic Pakistani qawwali singer Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan. From there, this unique festival established a momentum that continues to flourish.

This year, a near-capacity audience clicked 87,000 attendances over four days and nights in the green and shady expanse of Botanic Park. 61 acts featured on seven stages in a diverse program full of treats and surprises. Early festival highlights included a full-tilt show from Chic, the 70s disco hit machine led by producer /writer Nile Rodgers (playing all the singles including Le Freak), and a late-night set from Dirty Three, with Warren Ellis weaving his mercurial violin through The Zither Player and aptly, from their most recent CD, Moon on the Land.

Other Australian acts included, from Broome, the Pigram Brothers, the knockout reggae roots band Blue King Brown, and the haunting vocals of Gurrumul whose late afternoon concert attracted one of the largest audiences of the weekend.

Women artists feature prominently at WOMAD and this time was no exception. Scottish singer Eddi Reader sang new songs Dragonfly and Silent Bells, Perfect, her hit single from back in the Fairground Attraction days, and My Love is Like a Red Red Rose, one of her many memorable settings of the poems of Robbie Burns. Also creating a buzz was First Aid Kit, a young Swedish sister duo with songs from their US recorded album The Lion Roars, including the title song and a tribute to their country music idol Emmylou.

A Sunday night favourite was Grammy winner Dobet Gnahore, from the Ivory Coast, performing with three outstanding musicians including her husband and co-writer Colin Laroche de Feline. Striking looking in her face paint, her dreadlocks drawn back with a scarlet scarf, she captured the crowd with her expressive voice and lithe, athletic dancing - she is a global music star.

The final day had many pleasures including the eccentric Japanese group, Pascals, playing banjo, violins, toy pianos and duck whistles, Penguin Café performing the theme from the film Malcolm, and an upbeat show from veteran anti-apartheid campaigner Johnny Clegg.

But the night went to the frenetic closing set from Baaba Maal, from Senegal. Looking like a Venetian doge in his satin cloak and surrounded by drummers and dancers, he spoke and sang about justice for Africa, the Dakar Moon and created magic with the closer, Yiriyaro (Percussion Storm). Once again, WOMADelaide has the world on a musical string.

Murray Bramwell

"Capacity crowd gathers to celebrate a world of diversity" The Australian, March 14, 2012, p.17.

A Streetcar

Published: 2012-03-16 *Adelaide Festival*

March 14 , 2012 Adelaide Festival Theatre

A Streetcar Based on A Streetcar Named Desire by Tennessee Williams Odeon – Theatre de l'Europe Festival Theatre, Adelaide Festival Centre March 14. Tickets $ 30 - $ 129 Bookings : BASS 131 246/ adelaidefestival.com.au Until March 18.

First performed in 1947, Tennessee Williams' A Streetcar Named Desire is a 20th century classic, and one destined to endure because, in director Elia Kazan's 1951 film version, we have a permanent record of many features of the original stage production – its design, theatrical style and, of course, the performances by Marlon Brando as Stanley, Kim Hunter as Stella and Karl Malden as Mitch. Vivien Leigh replaced Jessica Tandy as Blanche, and however disputable her interpretation, it remains the template for Williams' portrait of a Southern belle in a changing world, a woman more sinned against than sinning.

The Adelaide Festival's exhilarating Odeon-Theatre of L'Europe production, directed and adapted by Krzysztof Warlikowski (and translated by Wajdi Mouawad) is fascinating in its deconstruction – and liberation- of a play trapped in the amber of its time and place. It does not replace the published original and presumes a knowledge of it, but with its fragmented, mashed-up, but very recognizable text, it reframes the action and the meaning.

The excellent design by Malgorzata Szczesniak (inventively lit by Felice Ross) turns the spacious Festival Theatre stage into a bowling alley with rows of metaphoric skittles waiting to fall. It also features, literally, a glass menagerie – sealed, but transparent, acting spaces representing bedrooms and bathroom -highlighting the characters' entrapped isolation. The real-time video screens, often a cliché on the stage, work powerfully, usually in monochrome close-up, to intensify the performances.

Central to the success of this production is the outstanding performance by Isabelle Huppert as Blanche. Waifish, coquettish, anxious, euphoric, she captures the wild mood swings of Blanche, the party girl in little black dress and stilettos; Blanche with an eye for St Laurent and Dior clothes she can't afford; Blanche the lost soul whose time is running out. It is a portrait that reveals her energy and intelligence as well as her trusting nature. When she flirts with Stanley in what Williams calls their date with destiny, her vulnerability is terrifying. As Stanley, Andrzej Chyra is blunt, selfish and deliberately uncharismatic – even if he is catnip to the enmeshed, sexually charged Stella (Florence Thomassin). Yann Collette plays a rather sinister Mitch and Renate Jett as Eunice, doubles as a singer/narrator.

Not everything works, however. The interpolations from other literary sources are sometimes cryptic and - especially the huge scrolling text of a 16th century Italian poem about star-crossed warriors Tancredi and Clorinde - seem misjudged. Similarly, the narrator's direct address to the audience about commitment in love, and the use of songs, such as the cheesy Eric Carmen composition All by Myself, is jarring.

But nothing detracts from the vivacious assurance of this production, or our sense of re-visiting a great play in an invigorated way.

Murray Bramwell

"Masterful wringing of a belle" The Australian, March 16, 2012, p.14.

New Sounds in the Park

Published: 2013-02-27 *WOMADelaide · Theatre*

WOMADelaide 2013 Preview

Murray Bramwell

The line-up for this year's WOMAD in Botanic Park has been announced and the anticipation begins. It is a big list – with three days and four nights to cover - and there is the usual mix of familiar names and those never-heard-of-till-now- performers who will doubtless join the 20 year list of artists who, once seen and heard, are never forgotten. Names like Youssou N'Dour, Sheila Chandra, Toumani Diabate, Afro Celt Sound System, L. Subramaniam and Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan come to mind – as do dozens more, all now part of our personal Womad playlists.

Some of this year's headliners are names we know. There is reggae legend Jimmy Cliff, indelibly linked with *The Harder They Come* and *You Can Get it if You Really Want.* He has a new CD, aptly named *Rebirth,* and is supported by his backing band Engine Room. Tracks like *World Upside Down, Ship is Sailing* and *One More* (also on the indispensible WOMADelaide 2013 Sampler) will renew the interest of even the already rusted-on fans.

Also performing on Sunday night is Salif Keita, for me the most memorable and haunting of all the Afrobeat aristocracy who have played at Womad. His Malian griot heritage blends powerfully with the eclectic funk, groove and jazz influences that have layered a succession of great albums. My favourite is still *Amen* with such crowd chant classics as *Yele n Na* and *Lony*, but his latest CD *Tale* is a fresh new take – the track *Samfy* even includes a sample from the B-52s' *Planet Claire*.

South African artists feature regularly at Womad. It is now four years ago that we saw the esteemed freedom pioneer Miriam Makeba, who, alas, died later that year (we recently lost another music legend headliner, Ravi Shankar) This year Hugh Masekela, master jazz rhythm trumpeter and staunch anti-Apartheid campaigner will lead his band through a repertoire drawn from a career that began in 1954.

His 2008 album *Phola (to get well, to heal)* with tracks such *Bring it Back Home, Sonnyboy* and *the Joke of Life* remind us of that exceptional form of courage and character which, like the spirit of Nelson Mandela himself, is creative, just, reconciliatory and always looking forward. So too with the Soweto Gospel Choir which, for more than ten years, has presented its compelling blend of African hymn, American gospel and Jamaican chant.

Also performing in the Adelaide Festival program, as well as Womad, is viola da gamba player Jordi Savall. Celebrated as the director of the Hesperion XX ensemble, Savall has been a major figure in the revival of early music. His CD, *The Celtic Viol,* is a vibrant miscellany of Irish and Scottish tunes, jigs and laments - and for his Monday night performance he is accompanied by Andrew Lawrence-King on Irish harp and Frank McGuire on bodhran. Scottish trad trio LAU will also carry the Celtic music flag. May there be many more at future Womads.

Women musicians often hold up more than half the Womad sky and this year is no exception. Spanish singer Amaparo Sanchez brings a blend of Hispanic influences, as indicated in the title of her current album *Tucson-Habana.* Accompanied by Joey Burns and John Convertino from influential roots band (and recent Womad guests) Calexico, as well featuring guest vocalist Omara Portuondo, Sanchez brings bravura intensity with *Hoja en Blanco, Desde Siempre* and the sampler track, *Corazon de Realidad*.

Algerian singer Souad Massi is also a likely highlight. Her CD, *O Houria (Liberty)* is a Parisian blend of North African lyricism and contemporary pop. Some lyrics in Algerian, others in English, the song titles include *All Remains to be Done, Stop Pissing me Off* and, as a coda, with guest singer Paul Weller, *Let Me Be in Peace.*

Mari Boine, an indigenous Sami woman from far-Northern Norway (and also Professor of Musicology at Nesna University College), blends her native *joik* music with contemporary jazz and folk styles. With her commanding and intriguing melodies, her terrific CD *Sterna Paradisea (Cuovgga Airras)* lists song titles such as *Skealbma (The Mischevous) De mana Rahkasan (For my daughter*) and *Iditveiggodettin (Dawn).*

It is good to see Womad beginning to draw on the rich talent in the indie Americana scene. Abigail Washburn who has recently released a playful, plaintive solo album entitled *City of Refuge*, appears with collaborator Kai Welch at 7 pm on Saturday night and again late afternoon on Sunday. Also in the richly variegated weird folk style are UK singer and violinist Seth Lakeman (whose plaintive single *Lady of the Sea* is a YouTube hit) and, playing one concert only on Friday night, The Tallest Man on Earth, aka Swedish songwriter (and Bob Dylan sort-of-soundalike), Kristian Matsson. He played before at the Womad Earth Station in 2011 and many of us will be keen to survey his heights again.

The Australian contingent is a strong one with some true crowd favourites. The Cat Empire will reign supreme on Friday night and gutsy blues singer/guitarist Mia Dyson and local SA favourite Heather Frahn will also draw the numbers. You Am I veteran and treasure, Tim Rogers will perform with The Bamboos , whose current album *Medicine Man* promises a great live set, as do thumping reggae dub unit Kingfisha, and, from across the Tasman, Kiwi duo Swamp Thing, whose release *Balladeer*, sounds very easy to sink into.

Then there are the intriguing groups and performers who represent living traditions and styles and extend our sense of the richness and variety of global music . From India this time we have two notable women performers – the Hindustani classical vocalist, Manjiri Kelkar, accompanied on tabla and harmonium, and representing the Southern Carnatic classical tradition, vocalist Sudha Ragunathan.

The late night midnight hour spot on Friday night was first claimed by the extraordinary Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan. This time the Alim Qasimov Ensemble from Azerbaijan will perform in the mugham tradition, a form of sung poetry with musical accompaniment.

Other performers not to be missed include Malian ngoni player Bassekou Kouyate and his band Ngoni Ba, Vieux Farka Toure (also from Mali) and Japanese duo Shunsuke Kimara and Etsuro Ono playing a traditional banjo-like instrument known as the tsugari-shamisen. Mention should also be made of The Volatinsky Trio, with their enticing mix of guitar, cello and cimbalom.

There are many names I haven't mentioned, including a whole program of DJs and electronica as well as strolling park performers from Compaignie Luc Amoros.

But I want to close with my two favourites. Oud player and mesmerising vocalist Dhafer Youssef plays late on Sunday night at Stage 2 and will be worth staying on for. He performed at the Guitar Festival here a few years back - in duet with German guitarist Wolfgang Muthspiel (they have an aptly named CD entitled *Glow)*. His singing and musicianship was truly extraordinary.

And, at the Zoo Stage on closing night, will be the cellist Zoe Keating. From the West Coast of the US, she wrangles an array of live samples, loops, sustains and reverbs to weave exciting and sublime sounds. She played to enthusiastic audiences at the most recent Cabaret Festival and anyone who heard (and watched) her then, will be back for more of her dazzling repetitions. Her newest recording is called *Into the Trees*, which is where, from March 8 to 11 in Botanic Park , we also will be heading. Let the wild rumpus begin.

Delightful farce delivers a dose of Britain in ‘63

Published: 2013-03-05 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

March 3 , 2013 Adelaide Festival Theatre

One Man, Two Guvnors by Richard Bean Based on The Servant of Two Masters by Carlo Goldoni with songs by Grant Olding National Theatre of Great Britain Her Majesty’s Theatre, Adelaide March 1. Tickets $ 30 - $ 109 Bookings : BASS 131 246 or adelaidefestival.com.au Until March 9.

Sydney Theatre Company season March 30 –May 11. Melbourne Theatre Company season May 17- June 22.

From the moment The Craze, a young skiffle and beat band complete with quiffs and skinny maroon suits, takes the stage at Her Majesty’s, the National Theatre’s production of O*ne Man, Two Guvnors* starts to hum. Richard Bean’s adaptation of *The Servant of Two Masters*, Carlo Goldoni’s commedia dell’arte farce – has been delivered, delightfully intact, to Brighton, England 1963.

All of the tricks and tropes, japes and capers - mistaken identities, double dealings, frazzled fathers, dimwitted star-crossed lovers, not to mention loyal maids and mischievous servants – are captured and refreshed. The date 1963 is significant, it reminds us that fifty years ago, the first tunes from the Beatles re-minted British pop culture, including its comedy.

So, while *One Man, Two Guvnors* celebrates the old Palladium comedy, and the vulgar laffs of Brighton Pier, its zany humour mixes Frankie Howerd with the Pythons, radio comedies like *Take it from Here* with Peter Cook and Dudley Moore. The retro format is not a ticket to cliché, as often commedia revivals are, nor does it dip in the bitter sexist and racist undertow of some of the old music hall. Here the ham acting is finely smoked and the cod is salty fresh. National director Nicholas Hytner has ensured a briskness and airiness to the comedy, ably assisted by physical comedy director Cal McCrystal. And Grant Olding’s award-winning songs stylishly echo both Lonnie Donnegan skiffle and the tender brashness of Mersey pop.

Mark Thompson’s designs are constant fun, whether the faded pastel décor which frames the proscenium, the wacky painted flats of the Cricketers’ Arms pub or the street scenes where the intrigues occur. And the improbable collisions of wallpaper, curtains, striped suits and pre-Quant frocks, aptly match the verbal antics of the performers.

The large cast not only manages the intricacies of the comedy, they have a lot of fun of their own. The double-takes, the corpsing, the improvised asides, the clever use of audience plants, all amp up the humour. Colin Mace anchors the Pantalone role as Charlie Clench, father of Pauline (Kellie Shirley) and in-law to Alan (Leon Williams) hilariously gormless as the lovers. Rosie Wright is delightful as the cross-dressed Rachel, Edward Bennett’s upper class twit Stanley Stubbers is a hoot and Peter Caulfield’s plate rattling Alfie is a show stopper.

But the clinching success is the brilliant turn by the lead, Owain Arthur, as Patrick Henshall. The role may have been originally made for James Corden, but it now fits Arthur like a fabulously ghastly check suit. His Welsh accent, his amazing agility, his warmth and charm, embody the spirit of the clown while his wit and greedy cunning is the subversive swipe of satire.

Murray Bramwell

Published in The Australian as “Delightful farce delivers a dose of Britain in ‘63” March 4, 2013, p.15.

When London was hit by bombs

Published: 2013-03-05 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

March 3 , 2013 Adelaide Festival Theatre

Thursday by Bryony Lavery Brink Productions and the English Touring Theatre Norwood Town Hall, The Parade, Norwood February 28. Tickets $ 30 - $ 59 Bookings : BASS 131 246 or adelaidefestival.com.au Until March 16.

“This is a play, not a documentary,” Bryony Lavery writes in the program notes for *Thursday*, “ It is a theatrical response and offering to an enormous human event.” The event was on Thursday, July 7, 2005 - the day that four bombs were exploded in inner London, killing 56 people and injuring more than 700.

One of the victims on 7/7 was Dr Gill Hicks, originally from Adelaide, but resident in London. She was the last living victim rescued, she lost both legs, and was initially labeled by her rescuers only as “one unknown”. She is widely known now, for her courage and as founder of the organization, M.A.D. for Peace. *Thursday* she emphasises, is inspired by what happened to her, but is not a literal account.

Thursday is a day in the life of six strap-hanging commuters and the people close to them. In the extended opening scene of this premiere Adelaide Festival production, we see a range of characters readying for work - dragging out of bed, stumbling to bathrooms, fractious with partners, thinking into the day. They bid hurried goodbyes, leaving behind dangling conversations, unfinished business, all in the routine bustle of the ordinary day.

Director Chris Drummond expertly marshalls these overlapping character threads, even though this section is overlong and, at times, over-written and confusing. The latter sections, however, especially the rescue and the hospital are first-rate. Dan Potra’s excellent set, splendidly lit by Colin Grenfell, creates a moveable series of pale rooms (in houses and hospitals) often shrouded with scrim as we look into the intimate lives of the characters. Through a doorway, at the back, Quentin Grant plays his looping, melodic piano, gently underscoring the action.

The performances by Australian actors from Brink, along with UK performers for the English Touring Theatre, bring Lavery’s array of citizens into sharp detail. Lena Kaur and Rochenda Sandell are the bickering girlfriends, Paul Blackwell, urban expert Lionel, Deidre Rubenstein is the widowed, bewildered Elizabeth and Nathan O’Keefe plays Ryan in conflict between his difficult mother and fiancé, Bonita (Emma Handy). ET, the vehement young man with the back pack, is played by Tom Mothersdale and Martin Hutson is Kev, the not-really-coping boyfriend .

In the lead, Kate Mulvany is outstanding as Rose, particularly steering the shifts in tone and perspective in the latter half of the play.

Briony Lavery’s text (which uses the device of the ‘Someone’, where actors step momentarily out of character to create an external, discontinuous narrative) memorably captures particulars and feelings , celebrates the marvel of the city in working harmony and describes both the catastrophe and the selfless human response when it is rent by violence. She reminds us that we are all just atoms - but we can also reconstitute and renew. These are good reasons why *Thursday* is a day – and a play - to remember.

Murray Bramwell

Published in slightly abridged form on *The Australian* web page March 3, 2013 and in text form as “When London was hit by bombs” *The Australian*, March 4, 2013, p.15.

Star’s stand-in acquits himself well in murderer’s tale

Published: 2013-03-05 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

March 4 , 2013 Adelaide Festival Theatre

The Kreutzer Sonata Based on the Novella by Leo Tolstoy Adaptation by Sue Smith State Theatre Company. The State Theatre Company Scenic Workshop, Adelaide Festival Centre. March 2. Tickets $ 25 - $ 65 Bookings : BASS 131 246 or adelaidefestival.com.au Until March 17.

The first night of a new play is always a high pressure event. The first night of a featured work in an arts festival, even more so. When it is the city’s leading theatre company on display amongst interstate and international productions, the stakes get even higher. So, when the eminent actor, Barry Otto withdrew from his solo role in State Theatre’s *The Kreutzer Sonata*, suffering acute exhaustion after only the second preview, it must have felt like incoming Artistic Director, Geordie Brookman’s worst nightmare.

Fortunately, the company has brought in replacement actor, Renato Musolino, for a script-in-hand reading which, after only four performances, has brought the production close to the theatrical experience first envisaged. Tolstoy’s strange, querulous novella, freshly adapted by Sue Smith, is after all, reported by an observer, so, unlike many monologues, here a storyteller with a text in hand is quite plausible.

The unnamed narrator describes a train journey during which passengers chat flippantly about the pitfalls of love and marriage. When an intense, agitated man overhears the discussion, he reveals himself as Vasily Pozdnyshev, an acquitted wife murderer, who like Coleridge’s Ancient Mariner insists on unburdening his jealous, deranged confession.

Staged in the industrial setting of the scenic workshop, Brookman and designer Geoff Cobham have created an L-shaped metal grid with a single chair for use by the narrator as the story intensifies. Behind him, Thom Buchanan’s heavily etched black and white drawings of landscapes, railways and labyrinthine interiors are cleverly animated with time-lapse effects by video designer Chris Petridis.

The music, selected and performed by pianist Gabriella Smart (accompanied by Elizabeth Layton on violin) adds much to the emotional and dramatic effect of the production. Beethoven’s *Kreutzer Sonata* features, of course. It is the trigger to the Pozdnyshev’s jealous attack on his musician wife and her lover the violinist, Troukachevsky. Other works by Chopin, Phillip Glass, Carl Vine and Nine Inch Nails also blend evocatively into the mix.

Musolino’s performance is expertly managed. He reads with complete precision, maintaining the cadence and resisting any urge to riff or improvise. He narrates the frenzied, cruel climax of the killer’s tale with especially compelling effect.

Tolstoy’s story is a disquieting, deeply misanthropic view not only of marital fidelity and love, but of human instinct itself. G.K. Chesterton observed drily that the Russian “is not content with pitying humanity for its pain. He also pities humanity for its pleasures.”

This enthralling production leaves us with the grim, unresolved paradox that a human creation as sublime as the *Kreutzer Sonata* could also unleash such ferocity in an ordinary man.

Murray Bramwell

Published in slightly abridged form as “Star’s stand-in acquits himself well in murderer’s tale.” The Australian, March 5, 2013, p.17.

Parks and Re-creation

Published: 2013-03-10 *Adelaide Festival · Music*

Van Dyke Parks with Daniel Johns, Kimbra and the Adelaide Art Orchestra Thebarton Theatre March 8.

Murray Bramwell

Artistic director, David Sefton had always planned to include Van Dyke Parks in his first Adelaide Festival and among the hit-and-miss, mix-and-almost match fare of this week's Brassland events, this Thebarton show has been a highlight. Much has to do with the genial, outgoing presence of Parks himself. But equally, the enthusiastic participation by Daniel Johns and electro-pop favourite, Kimbra turned an eclectic assemblage of parts into something wholly surprising and satisfying.

Van Dyke Parks' career as performer, composer, producer and arranger spans nearly fifty years. His collaborations over that time have given him cult status – the list is long, from Brian Wilson (Parks wrote lyrics for the Beach Boys' *Smile* album) Ry Cooder, the Byrds and Frank Zappa to more recent performers such as Rufus Wainwright, Joanna Newsom and – Silverchair.

Parks was twenty three when he wrote his ambitious first album *Song Cycle*. That was 1967 and I remember it well because, on the strength of a review in *Sing Out!* magazine (comparing it favourably with the Beatles' *Sergeant Pepper*, released at the same time) I bought it - and still have my battered vinyl copy. It was a strange, beguiling album, with its densely layered production, shifting tempi and lyrical orchestrations, not to mention the intriguingly quirky lyrics. And, at a time when musicians looked like frizzy birds of paradise with moustaches and beads, Van Dyke, in his brown tweed and earnest horn-rimmed specs, looked like he worked in a university library.

Forty six years later, he is looking plumply professorial in his pink shirt and striped tie. He is no longer a brunette, he drily observes in his distinctive Mississippi drawl, but with almost stentorian authority he commands the stage from behind the piano, surrounded by the excellent musicians of the Adelaide Art Orchestra led by Tim Sexton. The show opens with a spirited version of *Black Jack Davy* – the Rosetta stone of Appalachian music as Parks calls it. Daniel Johns and Kimbra take the stage to a noisy welcome. Johns is in comfortable grunge leather jacket and skinny jeans, Kimbra, elegant in a sculptured strapless white frock, with scarlet lipstick to match the Veronica Lake fringed hair. They move easily with the material as Parks conducts from the keyboard, the AAO finding their stride in among it. *Vine Street* and *Palm Desert*, from *Song Cycle* follow, Parks' vocals mixed high and clear, and reminding us of his links with the Great American Songbook, lyricists like Cole Porter and innovators like Sondheim.

The program covers his idiosyncratic discography – an instrumental from *Jump!,* Johns singing lead on *Come Along* from the Brer Rabbit sequence. The marvellous *Orange Crate Art*, title tune from Parks's 1995 album recorded with Brian Wilson, is a highlight. *On the Wings of a Dove*, has some of the structure and mood of Kurt Weill but the lyrics, like those of the John Hartford composition *Delta Queen Waltz* epitomise southern Americana.

Always outspoken politically, Parks reminds us of the greatness of the New Deal Democrat President Roosevelt with *FDR in Trinidad* from his calypso-inflected *Discover America* album from 1972 and closes the first set with the anti-imperialist *Cowboy* and the chirpy 30's optimism of *Sail Away*.

Showcasing Parks's arrangements for Silverchair's *Diorama* and *Young Modern* albums, the second half opens with a tide of Silverchair nostalgia. Johns leads the charge, with Kimbra adding vocals, Paul Mac on piano and the orchestra navigating the tricky changes. Johns's assured performances of *All Across the World* and *Strange Behaviour* reminds us that the collaboration with Parks was a creative jolt in the band's development at that time.

Parks returns to direct Johns's duet with Kimbra on the show-stopping *He Needs Me*, co-written for the ill-fated *Popeye* movie with Harry Nilsson - "the only musical genius I ever met. " Always astride a range of American styles and idioms, Parks hammers the klavier for Johns's wailing version of the Rev Gary Davis's tormented spiritual – *Death Don't Have No Mercy*. After that, Lowell George's *Sailing Shoes* are a welcome lightness of step.

Van Dyke Parks closes with a solo version of *Song Cycle's* vexed 60's critique, *The All Golden* and, to great delight, some bars of *Waltzing Matilda*. He has captivated the audience with his mordant, narrative wit and united a very diverse audience (many heckling for Kimbra in the early stages of the night). His conspicuous regard both for the younger collaborators and the tireless orchestra is like a welcoming smile . To borrow from the Louis Moreau Gottschalk tune he played earlier - it has been a hot night in the tropics; the hall was steaming and breezes non-existent. But the band, led by this diminutive maestro, was totally cool.

also published on The Barefoot Review website, March 9, 2012

Holocaust horrors amplified

Published: 2013-03-16 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

March 13 , 2013 Adelaide Festival Theatre

Kamp Created by Herman Helle, Pauline Kalker and Arlene Hoornweg . Hotel Modern The Space, Adelaide Festival Centre. March 12. Tickets $ 30 - $ 59 Bookings : BASS 131 246 or adelaidefestival.com.au Until March 17.

It is part of the tragedy of modern times that we can know about catastrophic events but still not fathom them. We are told the statistics from the two World Wars, for instance, soldier and civilian fatalities in the tens of millions. They represent terrible events, they gnaw at our sense of our own humanity. But the problem remains - their scale is unimaginable.

In their unexpectedly compelling stage work, *Kamp*, Netherlands company Hotel Modern has found an innovative way to give perspective and comprehension to the systematic atrocities in the Nazi extermination camps, set up and operated in Poland from 1942 to 1945. The most notorious, Auschwitz-Birkenau, is the model for *Kamp*.

And it is literally a model. Every detail of the layout of this evil facility is carefully replicated in tiny scale, including 3000 miniature figurines depicting the guards and prisoners. Across the whole stage we see the barracks, the gas chambers, the crematoria, the parade areas and the terrifying maw at the main gate where the trains, crammed with new victims, steam through, greeted by the camp's cruelly macabre motto – *Arbeit macht frei* (work makes you free).

Operated with exquisite precision by performers, Maartje Van Den Brink, Menno Vroon and Trudi Klever, these miniscule objects – carts, trucks, work parties, gallows and so on - are filmed with a camera probe and projected on to a screen at the back of the stage. It is like watching a grainy newsreel, an animated documentary of the daily routine of a mechanized death factory.

The sound design by Ruud Van der Pluijm is crucial to the riveting success of this production. From the disturbing normality of the dawn chorus to the thunderous roar of the trains, the sound is magnified and enveloping. When a prisoner collapses and is beaten by a guard, the almost interminable bludgeoning is amplified with terrifying consequence.

Everything in *Kamp* has a re-sensitising effect; every minute detail illustrating the moral enormity of the crime. As the camera slowly pans the groups of prisoners in close-up, the faces – seemingly just rudimentary eyes and open mouths pressed in little dollops of pale plasticine – take on poignant individuality.

The general effect is of Munch's famous image of *The Scream,* but *Kamp's* creators Herman Helle, Pauline Kalker and Arlene Hoornweg, remind us that everyone here, including every guard, is a human being - in a vortex of such cruelty and suffering, that their mouths, like those in the audience, are gaping in disbelief.

Murray Bramwell

"Holocaust horrors amplified" *The Australian*, March 15, 2013, p.14

Fringe serves up a mixed bag of delights

Published: 2013-04-02 *Adelaide Fringe*

March 19

Adelaide Fringe 2013 February 15 – March 17

Second only to its Edinburgh counterpart, the annual Adelaide Fringe, now running over four weeks, has an uncurated program of over 900 events - gathering exponents of cabaret, circus, dance, music, and theatre, as well as hosting more than 360 comedy acts, many limbering up for the next leg to Melbourne.

Household names and talented newcomers alike, Fringe artists generate an energy, skill and enthusiasm which captivates audiences and galvanises the city. This year attendances were up again by 10.9 percent with more than 400,000 tickets sold. Director Greg Clarke cites a longer season, affordability and audience appeal for the increase.

With pop-up venues all over town, as well as the established Garden of Unearthly Delights in Rundle Park, the Fringe turned every nook and cranny into a show space. In the Garden, at the Big Top, the hyper-acrobatic, hip-hop troupe Circolombia blended physical spectacle with a reminder of the chronic poverty that is Colombian street reality. Elsewhere at the Vagabond, German illusionist Leo, aka Tobias Wegner, climbed walls, moved objects and triumphantly defied gravity, using a real time video feed which, in a 90 degree swivel, transformed his strange horizontal contortions into vertical amazement.

Each year, Holden Street Theatres sponsor recent hit shows from Edinburgh. This time it was UK company Second Shot Productions' *Glory Dazed*, a gritty drama about the impact of 21st century warfare on returning veterans. Devised by writer Cat Jones, in consultation with ex-soldiers from an offenders unit in England, and featuring Samuel Edward Coulson in the lead role, it was confronting theatre.

At The Tuxedo Cat, Melbourne collective ONFG's *One for the Ugly Girls*, by Tahli Corin and featuring Syd Brisbane, Lori Bell and Hannah Norris, provided a shrewd take on the stereotypes of beauty and romantic love. This excellent production has a season at Melbourne's Malthouse in May. At the Bakehouse, in the monologue *I am My Own Wife*, directed by Craig Behenna, Charles Mayer, deftly presented the extraordinary, true story of Charlotte von Mahlsdorf, a transvestite who survived both the Nazi and Stasi regimes in Berlin.

In other solo shows, Venezuelan born, Adelaide based, actor Alirio Zavarce presented his energetic and absorbing *Book of Loco*, a freewheeling exploration of life in two hemispheres, the ubiquity of "rational madness" and the grief of family loss. And, in another Fringe surprise, Emma Beech's droll and quietly observed *Homage to Uncertainty* proved a sure thing.

Murray Bramwell

Published in slightly edited form as "Fringe serves up a mixed bag of delights" The Australian, March 19, 2013, p.17.

Festival Trifecta

Published: 2014-02-19 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Murray Bramwell talks with Rosemary Myers about Windmill Theatre's program of new work and revivals in the Adelaide Festival.

If you look under "Our Claims to Fame' on Adelaide's Windmill Theatre's website there is a list of awards and nominations the company has received over the past five years – and it is astonishing. Last year alone, for their hit show *School Dance*, there were six Helpmann nominations (including two winners –Best Presentation for Children and Best Supporting Actor for Amber McMahon). There were also Sydney Theatre Award nominations and a South Australian Ruby Award. In 2012 there was a Sidney Myer award and nominations from critics' circles and the Melbourne Green Room.

Established in 2002 by Creative Producer, Cate Fowler, Windmill is a prime example of what can happen when theatre is well-resourced and given room to create and develop. It is a familiar platitude to say that children and young people deserve the best theatre with the most capable artistic teams, but it rarely happens. Windmill is one of those exceptions (as is Adelaide's other premier children's company: Patch Theatre, under the direction of Dave Brown)

Starting as a company for audiences up to age 12, Windmill changed tack in 2008 when its new artistic director, Rosemary Myers was appointed. Myers' work with Arena Theatre in Melbourne was already widely regarded, if not legend, and she recalls the pitch she made when she was interviewed for the Windmill job:

"I said I thought the company should have a signature stamp and a core investigation – a group of artists pursuing something. I wanted to bump up the age level to which the company worked and include teenagers. For me that older group is really challenging and most people are really scared of them. Kids coming to the theatre is very sellable, and adults are sellable, but people don't like investing in teenagers because they describe them as the 'lost years' and say they don't come to the theatre.

But my point is that the theatre doesn't speak to them and it doesn't excite them. They are hard to market to – but, essentially, just because it's tough is no reason we shouldn't try. And it is so liberating for art makers because it is such a contemporary palette they get to work with."

The first project Myers developed with Windmill was a re-jigged version of *The Wizard of Oz* with a strong cast including the excellent Ursula Yovich as Dorothy. Most distinctive, though, were the eye-popping technicolor designs by Jonathan Oxlade (in collaboration with video artist Chris More). Myers had been following Oxlade's work in Brisbane and had wanted to bring him into the company where he has become an important fixture in the creative team.

"I think that's what my time with the company has been about- connecting with like-minded artists… Matt Whittet is a similar part of that puzzle. There are a lot of amazing writers around but in choosing collaborators to make a theatrical language, you have to be in tune. "

Whittet also joined the caravan in 2009 – for the 18 month development of the Robin Hood re-make, *Fugitive*. Myers recalls -"I knew him as an actor and always liked his work, this skinny guy you can't stop watching." But it was her friend, Chris Mead, who was running Playwriting Australia, who recommended Whittet as a writer and sent Myers the script of *Twelve*, an early play written for Belvoir Street.

"I read the script and just loved it and said come over and we'll do this development on *Fugitive* and see what kind of rapport we have, if we have any at all. The whole play was virtually written in a week, we were so on fire about it. That was when we brought in Jonathan Oxlade (and musician and sound designer Luke Smiles) and the team just clicked."

Fugitive, which first opened in Adelaide in August 2010, returns as part of the Windmill Trilogy season in the 2014 Adelaide Festival- along with *School Play*, making a triumphant return after a national tour and its debut in the 2012 Festival. The third work is brand new, *Girl Asleep*, also written by Matthew Whittet, is based on the Sleeping Beauty fable and opens on February 28.

School Play, the company's most successful production to date, brought together Myers's team – Oxlade, Whittet, and Smiles – not only as designer, writer and musician, but as performers as well. Rosemary Myers comments:

"I'd known Luke Smiles as a sound designer, I also knew him as a dancer. I said lets have artists performing. Jonathan was always hilarious, Matt wrote the show but was also in it. I said I want all three of you in it – and it does have an autobiographical component to it. " Myers also has a core of actors whom she works with. Amber McMahon, hilarious as the belle of the ball in *School Dance* returns for *Girl Asleep*, others including Jude Henshall, Ellen Steele, Nathan O'Keefe, Patrick Graham and Geoff Revell have featured in Windmill productions and development workshops. Intensive development is a key feature of Myers' approach. Productions are often twelve to eighteen months in preparation.

"I like to have a template of the design and to do a test of it all because these shows are so finicky. I like to have a draft of how it's going and what it all means dramaturgically. That's a great thing about Windmill. We do our own seasons so we've got autonomy, we can steer our own ship. These works are expensive to make, so why not ensure they are as solid as you can make them by the time you put them out there?"

Reflecting on the three works being performed in repertory in the Festival, Myers notes that the new work, *Girl Asleep*, was intended, in part, to complement the other plays.

"*Girl Asleep*, yes, has a girl perspective but that wasn't our first thought. With *Fugitive* we thought a retelling of Robin Hood would be interesting for these times, and we thought : OK we have done the alpha male story, but that's quite a foreign story to a group of artists. We'll tell the loser story now, the teenage loser story that became *School Dance*, that was much closer to home. So now let's tell the outsider story. It's loosely based on Sleeping Beauty but the central character, Greta Driscoll is an outsider.

"Sleeping Beauty is such a psychological, Freudian story but if you read Bruno Bettelheim he talks about the explosive and dynamic phases of adolescence – these two extremes: the dynamic, crazy, full-on part, or the somnolent, disappear-into-your-room part. This play is more about that dream state – and while it should speak to everybody, this is a girl's story."

Later in the year the company have funding to make a film version of *Girl Asleep,* before embarking on a stage tour next year. And performing to large, mixed audiences is central – as Rosemary Myers enthuses:

"We find it thrilling to think about the theatre and that's been a big part of what we have done with Jonathan and Matt. We don't consciously say : 'we are living in age of CGI ' but we've enjoyed creating a theatricality that is so much about being 'live'. It's actually very old school, we do a lot of costume changes and wigs, but with a contemporary spin on it. It's really about going to an audience and saying: we are all here together in the room. Here's how we are going to make someone invisible. We'll put them in a onesie with sparkles on it. It's a funny way of saying someone is invisible and we are going to enjoy that leap of the imagination."

Published online at The Daily Review, February 19, 2014.

Carnival transforms the city and there are plenty of Fringe benefits

Published: 2014-02-21 *Adelaide Fringe*

Adelaide Fringe 2014 February 14 – March 16

The voluminous Adelaide Fringe opened last Friday. Defying recent torrential rain large crowds lined the streets for the night parade of performers and floats including a luminous disco cuttlefish. With a record 978 shows, including 473 Australian premieres, and box office at record levels, this vast, uncurated festival, second only to the Edinburgh extravaganza, transforms the Adelaide CBD into carnival.

New this year is the raffishly named Royal Croquet Club celebrating the re-opening of the newly landscaped Victoria Square. The Garden of Unearthly Delights, a familiar fixture at Rundle Park, continues to energise the East End café and pub scene attracting crowds to its big tops, little tops and spiegeltents. In the month long program in the Garden early favourites are emerging.

Canadian shadow puppeteer, Jeff Achtem's whimsical Swamp Juice, presents a raggedy tale of critters and monsters energetically and wittily managed from a range of contraptions and all created in full view, much to the gurgling delight of family audiences. Accompanied by a stylish jazz trio, Achtem completes this swampy saga with some terrific low-fi 3D projections.

Debuting exactly a year ago, Limbo returns to the Garden, tweaked and sharpened into a first class show. While musical wizard, New Yorker Sxip Shirey delivers a mercurial live score with startling vocal effects and a miscellany of instruments, the dazzling Limbo performers merge seamlessly into non-stop spectacle. From hand balancer Danik Abishev to gravity-defying pole master Mikael Bres to fire-eating sword- swallowing vamp Heather Holliday, Limbo does everything but stand still.

In the extensive Fringe theatre program, the international companies are first out of the blocks. At Holden Street Theatres, Ana Graham and Antonio Vega founders of Mexican company Por Piedad Teatro use charmingly simple staging, with chalk illustrations on black-boards, for A Special Day, a short play, set in Mussolini's Italy, about a brief encounter between a weary housewife and an unemployed radio announcer. Originally a 1977 film by Ettore Scola, A Special Day is touchingly recreated for the stage.

Sponsored by Holden Street from Edinburgh comes UK company Snuff Box with Bitch Boxer by Charlotte Josephine featuring Holly Augustine as Chloe a young hopeful for the London Olympics. After an over-eager opening this monologue settles into a poignantly detailed account of a girl grieving for her father and discovering that, as in the boxing ring, some battles are a waiting game.

And if you wondered whether you wanted to go a musical lecture on Einstein's General Theory of Relativity, the answer is absolutely yes. Dauntingly titled, *Relativitively Speaking* is a smart, funny exploration of Einstein, the man and his works. Written and performed at Holden Street by the energy-emitting John Hinton (with Jo Eagle on the Einsteinway piano), it is a theatrical chain reaction.

Murray Bramwell

Published in amended form as: "Carnival transforms the city and there are plenty of Fringe benefits" The Australian, February 21, 2014, p.12.

Over a century later Chekhov still delights

Published: 2014-02-25 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Adelaide Festival Theatre

The Seagull By Anton Chekhov Adaptation by Hilary Bell State Theatre Company. The State Theatre Company Scenic Workshop, Adelaide Festival Centre. Duration 2 hours 20 minutes February 25. Tickets $ 26 - $ 67 Bookings : BASS 131 246 or adelaidefestival.com.au Until March 16.

In a letter, written in 1895, to his friend Suvorin, Anton Chekhov described his new play *The Seagull* : "It's a comedy with three female and six male roles, four acts, a landscape (view of a lake), lots of talk about literature, little action and 180 pounds of love."

In one throwaway sentence Chekhov describes what, more than a century later, continue to be the challenges of his remarkable play. How can a play with a suicide in it be called a comedy ? What sort of play has people sitting round talking about the artists they haven't become ? How can the 180 pounds of love be so miserable for nearly everyone on stage?

State Theatre director Geordie Brookman describes Chekhov as a chameleon and certainly in his work there is a fine line between pleasure and pain - and an even finer one between pain and absurdity. Using Hilary Bell's crisp new adaptation , Brookman has done much to give this engaging production a directness and accessibility that recent Chekhov productions (such as Simon Stone's The Cherry Orchard) have keenly sought.

Staged in the company's Scenic Workshop, the audience is seated in two banks of opposing seats, looking down on Geoff Cobham's parquet wooden catwalk lit by thirty suspended bell-like lampshades. The production has a likeable informality. There is a briskness and playfulness in the presentation - whether in the musical links by Matthew Gregan on ukulele, or the extended business installing deckchairs in the opening scene.

But the strong performances also capture the shifting, often seismic moods of this mercurial play. Xavier Samuel is excellent as Konstantin, anxious, petulant, often close to tears, his scenes with the unworldly Nina (Lucy Fry) pitiful even in their folly.

This is true of all the wretched, unrequited lovers. Polina, the manager's wife, Medvedenko, the schoolteacher, and the young, free-spirited but defeated, Masha are memorably played by Lizzy Falkland, Matthew Gregan and, in her stomping boots, the outstanding Matilda Bailey. The overbearing celebrity couple Arkadina and Trigorin , (Rosalba Clemente and Renato Musolino) deprived of some of their glamour, are instead deftly highlighted in their desperate status anxiety.

As Dr Dorn, Chekhov's proxy, Terence Crawford is sardonically pragmatic but compassionate, as evident in his scene with Masha, and Paul Blackwell is warmly avuncular as Soren, especially in his tender connection to Konstantin. Not even Shamrayev (Chris Pitman, in a deadpan comic turn) trying to run an estate not a soiree, is exempt from the turbulence. As the Adelaide Festival begins, Geordie Brookman, the State Theatre Company and the ever-intriguing Anton Chekhov have already given us a highlight.

Murray Bramwell

Published in slightly amended form as "Over a century later Chekhov still delights", The Australian, February 27, 2014, p.12.

Music World

Published: 2014-02-25 *WOMADelaide · Theatre · Music*

Murray Bramwell previews a selection of the singers and sounds from Womadelaide 2014, opening March 7 to 11. Botanic Park, Adelaide.

For more than twenty years the first week in March in Adelaide has heralded, not just the Festival and Fringe, but Womadelaide, the enduringly popular music event with the portmanteau name that is both a local and national institution. First staged in 1992, under the wing of Rob Brookman's Festival, Peter Gabriel's UK concert venture Womad (that's acronym for world of music and dance) introduced Australian audiences to an extraordinary range of exceptional musicians – the Afrobeat sounds of Youssou N'Dour from Senegal, Tanzanian Remmy Ongala, Indian music from Dr L Subramaniam and Sheila Chandra and the unforgettable Qawwali vocals of the Pakistani master, the late Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan.

So many names have been added to that list over a succession of Womad festivals organised in Adelaide by Arts Projects Australia, each year extending and intriguing crowds with new sounds, both ancient and modern, from every part of the world. And with that, a number of constant factors have ensured Womadelaide's undoubted success. Most significant is the location – Botanic Park, right in the CBD, an oasis of green in the parched South Australian summer, with ample shade trees - including the enormous Moreton Bay figs which give the venue its unique character.

And from that has developed a sense of ritual and fond familiarity. There is a very high rate of recidivism among Womad patrons – many have attended every year since the festival began. Some who first came with their parents are now adults continuing the tradition. From the moment people enter the park they settle into its easy vibe. Everyone knows the drill and there is a gentle orderliness about sharing the space, keeping the park tidy and peacefully co-existing. The layout of the stages – in recent times expanded from five to seven – has remained the same, as have the excellent production values.

But there is nothing predictable about the program. Most festivals depend on well-known headliners to attract the crowd, whereas at Womad maybe two thirds or more of the artists are completely unknown to Australian fans. There are headliners, of course. Nigerian singer Femi Kuti and his band the Positive Force continue the Afrobeat presence at Womad, following such artists as Salif Keita and Baaba Maal. Performing from his latest CD *No Place for My Dream*, Kuti's songs, many in English, such as "No Work No Job No Money" and "Action Time", are rallying reminders of Developing World injustices. Femi Kuti and his band will perform the closing set on Monday night.

Billy Bragg is making a welcome return to Australia- and features for a first time at Womadelaide. In recent years, since his Woody Guthrie project, *Mermaid Avenue*, Bragg has turned his interest to American country styles and, with its mid-Atlantic accents, his most recent album *Tooth and Nail*, produced by US singer Joe Henry, sounds a very long way from Essex. Let's hope in his once-only Monday night set there might still be greetings to the new brunette.

US hip-hop pioneers, Arrested Development also perform just once- on Saturday night. After more than twenty years, Grammy awards and such recent albums as *Strong* – with tracks such as "Let Your Voice be Heard" and "Freedom" - they still deliver beats with heart.

Among the Celtic folk artists at Womad this year are Scottish band Breabach , a five piece band featuring rousing Highland pipes, but, as their 2012 CD *Bann* indicates, they have their lyrical shading as well. Also at the forefront of contemporary folk is English singer Sam Lee and Friends. With vocals eerily reminiscent of the late Bert Jansch, Lee's recent recording, *Ground of its Own* -with cornet and chimes on "On Yonder Hill" and loops and beats on "The Ballad of George Collins" – promises much for their Saturday 5pm sit-down set.

And while blues and Americana are often in short supply at Womad, fans will be pleased to see Australian master guitarist Jeff Lang at Speakers' Corner, and from the US, Pokey Lafarge and his band conjure the jugband ragtime swing of the 20s and 30s on such staples as "Wontcha Please Don't Do It" and "Kentucky Mae".

Women artists feature prominently at Womad and this year is no exception. Indie country singer Neko Case, who is touring the Eastern states in early March, performs only on Friday night. Featuring her ninth album, unfurlingly titled *The Worse Things Get the Harder I Fight, the Harder I Fight the More I Love You*, Neko Case will be gathering admirers in Adelaide. Australian based artists include Ngaiire, former singer from Blue King Brown, with her debut CD *Lamentations*, Brisbane singer Thelma Plum, Adelaide newcomer Loren Kate and, leading the sweet-sounding folk pop band Tinpan Orange, Emily Lubitz. Fado is never far away at Womad and highly-praised Portuguese singer Carminho performs at twilight on Monday.

Womad is nothing if not eclectic and numbers of bands draw on a farrago of influences – like Brooklyn-based brass and percussion unit, Red Baraat with its North Indian, Bollywood and jazz influences, Japanese outfit Osaka Monaurail devoted to the works of James Brown, and the Spanish surf sound of Los Coronas. The seven piece French Algerian group Dub Inc play Saturday afternoon and Monday at 7pm – they have a rich vibrant sound and should be terrific. As will New Zealand favourites Fat Freddy's Drop whose new album *Blackbird* has taken their assured mix of soul, techno and reggae to a new level. They only play on Friday and they will be a blast.

Also among the acts I am keen to see is the UK based Balanescu Quartet. Led by Romanian born violinist and composer Alexander Balanescu, they last played in Adelaide at the Barossa Music Festival in the early 90s when they accompanied the Meryl Tankard Dance company with their witty arrangements of Kraftwerk songs. This time they will perform live with a screening of *Marie T*, a tribute to Romanian singer Marie Tanase. Perhaps in their Monday set there will room for "Robots", "Autobahn" and "Pocket Calculator".

There are always some artists that make Womad memorable, whose music we have never heard before but they become immediate favourites. Latin piano wiz Robert Fonseca is a likely contender, as are Living Room, from Austria, a minimalist duo featuring percussion, bass clarinet and an invention called a pepephon. Scandinavian singer-songwriter Ane Brun is another: reminiscent of Beth Orton perhaps, or even Joni Mitchell, she plays twilight sets on both Saturday and Sunday- you will want to go to both. And don't miss the keening vocals and oud, synth and percussion sounds of Tunisian singer Emel Mathlouthi. Her current album, *Kelmti Horra*, reminds us how wide the world of music can be.

Published online The Daily Review, February 25, 2014

A familiar blend of comedy and fantasy

Published: 2014-03-01 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Adelaide Festival Theatre

Girl Asleep By Matthew Whittet Windmill Theatre. Space Theatre, Adelaide Festival Centre. Duration 1 hours 20 minutes February 28. Tickets $ 29 - $ 39 Bookings : BASS 131 246 or adelaidefestival.com.au Until March 15.

It is Greta Driscoll's fifteenth birthday and everybody is having a great time except her. She's in her bedroom, miserable, quarrelling with only best friend Elliot, and besieged by family and mean girls from school. Then Greta retreats into somnolence and *Girl Asleep* morphs into a variation of Sleeping Beauty - waiting to be awakened, not by a prince, but by her recognition that childhood is over and a new stage must begin.

Windmill Theatre's newest production has all the bright, bold, energetic hallmarks of earlier works - *Fugitive* and the award winning hit, *School Dance*, both of which are being revived for Windmill's Trilogy in the current Festival program. The creative team features the usual suspects: director Rosemary Myers, writer Matthew Whittet, designer Jonathan Oxlade, soundtrack creators Luke Smiles and Andrew Howard, and lighting designer Richard Vabre. They bring together a familiar blend of fantasy, comedy and gentle sentiment aimed at all audiences but especially the often-gnarly, mid-teen crowd.

Opening with a blast of sound and strobe, the production is a swirl of colour and movement from Oxlade's jokey Seventies domestic décor patterned in bright pink regency floral, to an eclectic soundtrack ranging from Brian Eno and Suzie Quattro to the croonings of Serge Gainsbourg, especially favoured by Greta's older sister, Genevieve. The costumes are retro-comic - Greta's father Conrad in beige shorts and long socks, mother Janet with a copper-coloured Marge Simpson beehive do, and a whole procession of party guests in wigs and kitsch dress-ups. As Greta, Ellen Steele anchors the play. She vividly captures the shyness and volatility of an insecure teen longing to stay in a childhood of plastic horses, origami pen-friend letters, and music boxes.

The other five cast members power through a multitude of character and costume changes. Eamonn Farren is endearing as Elliot, dorky, good-natured, and a staunch friend, Jude Henshall is believably catty as Genevieve, and creepy as Jade, one half of the nasty Hunter twins who terrorise the school. Matthew Whittet is droll as Conrad, all dad jokes and mutton chops, as well as his weird alter ego, the snot-covered Goblin. Paige Whitby plays Greta aged seven, and Amber McMahon presents a daffy comic smorgasbord as Janet, Umber Hunter, the icy Queen and Greta, the Finnish pen-friend.

Girl Asleep, like its predecessors is vivacious and begins and concludes memorably. But, despite some theatrical delights, the fantasy quest section, where Greta searches for her missing music box, is over-long and confusing and could use an edit. It would be unfortunate to let it detract from the tender truthfulness of this contemporary fable.

Murray Bramwell

"A familiar blend of comedy and fantasy" The Australian, March 4, 2014, p.12

Thoroughly modern classic Rome

Published: 2014-03-03 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Adelaide Festival Theatre

Roman Tragedies By William Shakespeare Adapted by Bart van den Eynde, Jan Peter Gerrits, and Alexander Schreuder Translated by Tom Kleijn Toneelgroep Amsterdam Festival Theatre, Adelaide Festival Centre. Duration 5 hours 45 minutes March 1. Until March 2.

We are well used to up-dated reinterpretations of Shakespeare; they have long been the new orthodoxy. But *Roman Tragedies*, from Netherlands company, Toneelgroep Amsterdam, is as current as breaking news and infinitely more penetrating. Director Ivo van Hove has not simply given a modern spin to *Coriolanus, Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, he has revealed them with such thematic intelligence and theatrical invention that the result is breathtaking.

Designed by Jan Versweyveld, the Festival Theatre stage is set like a hotel foyer with its own television studio. Low set divans in neutral tones are interspersed with raised wooden platforms for performers, while large suspended lampshades provide much of the stage light. Some of the divan space is for actors but most is for the several hundred audience members invited to watch the players at close quarters, either directly, or through the many monitors, including the huge proscenium screen, providing live video feed and surtitles.

This production suspends much of the usual stage etiquette. The audience is invited to tweet messages, buy drinks on stage, and come and go from the performance at any time. When there are short breaks to prepare new scenes, we are told exact times to return. These brief refresher stops are sufficient to continue the almost six hour marathon effortlessly. It is rather like binge TV watching – eight straight episodes of *Borgen* or a whole series of *House of Cards.*

The text in translation quotes from Shakespeare, and though modernized is not idiomatic. Battle scenes are presented as blitzkriegs of percussion while a red LED news crawl text informs us of details, strategic gains and ominously predicts the time of death of central characters. Speeches are given as news conferences or studio crosses to anchors. The video cameras pan the action constantly, identifying actors and narrative shifts, but they do not diminish the sense of live performance.

There are too many player highlights to include here, but Gijs Scholten van Aschat as the autocrat Coriolanus disdaining the citizenry is grimly familiar, and the oedipal scenes with his mother Volumnia (Frieda Pittoors) are chilling. In *Julius Caesar*, Alwin Pulinckz is outstanding as Brutus, the honest man who joins a conspiracy that becomes toxic. But the towering performance is Hans Kesting as Mark Antony, commanding in the "Friends Romans…" speech in honour of Caesar, and then, throughout the final two hours, in enmeshed, heroic folly with Cleopatra, mesmerically played by Chris Nietvelt.

Some theatre is so impressive it becomes a benchmark for everything else we see, *Roman Tragedies* is such a production.

Murray Bramwell

"Thoroughly modern classic Rome" The Australian, March 3, 2014, p.12.

Fringe Wrap 2014

Published: 2014-03-03 *Adelaide Fringe*

The Daily Review

Fringe Report Adelaide Fringe 2014

Murray Bramwell

The Adelaide Fringe is like a shoebox full of grasshoppers. And it keeps getting voraciously bigger and busier. Second only in size and influence to the Edinburgh Fringe (on which it was modelled forty four years ago), the Fringe went annual in 2008 and each year has set new records for attendance and box office. In 2014, the Fringe has more than 970 events scattered across the Adelaide inner city and beyond.

There are more than 160 venues in the city alone, with as many again in the suburbs and regional centres as far afield as Port Augusta. The recently re-landscaped Victoria Square is a focus this time, with the eccentrically decorated Royal Croquet Club drawing long queues for performances and other entertainments.

Adelaide's thriving bar and café precinct around Rundle Street in the East End is especially buzzy at this time of year. Across the road in Rundle Park, the Garden of Unearthly Delights, operated by Strut and Fret Productions and Buxton Walker, has been a honey pot of comedy, music, circus and burlesque for thirteen years, and enthusiastic crowds – including, last weekend, fans in town for the Clipsall 500 car race- wander among the big tents and spiegel-tents, kiosks and market stalls looking for a lively show and a bite to eat.

As it is for the Rhino Room, the Arts Theatre and The Governor Hindmarsh Hotel, comedy is king at the Garden. Dave Hughes has taken residence for a month of shows, reminding us, whether he's talking about his domestic life, his dog, his frustrations at the checkout, or riffing off whatever is happening in the room, he is still the Everybloke of Australian comedy, his slacker humour and underdog sympathies, undiminished by TV celebrity.

Originally from New Zealand, comic Cal Wilson's new show *It Could have Been Me,* ponders roads not taken and incarnations not inhabited. She has some quirky alter egos including Fairy Robot Sparkle, the obsessively anxious children's party performer, and Adele, the earnest, linguistically-correct, organiser of the book readers' club at local store, Fraction too Much Fiction. It is skilled character comedy, sharply observed and mercilessly delivered.

Returning to the Garden from stints in the UK, The Boy With Tape on His Face reminds us that mime can still be quietly amusing. Silenced by a chunk of gaffer tape, the Boy nonetheless successfully summons and organises the audience to participate in lightsaber duels, bullfights, flamenco with false teeth clackers, and golf with ping pong balls. With a soundtrack full of bombastic fanfares – *Chariots of Fire, Eye of the Tiger* and *This Spake Zarathustra* – The Boy with Tape adds the mock heroic to his slapstick pratfalls. His press-ganged co-performers love every minute of his gently disarming whimsy.

Among the circus variety acts, two stand out. Limbo, which debuted at last year's Fringe, has since toured extensively and streamlined into a top-rate show with vampy fire-eater and sword swallower Heather Holliday, hand balancer Danik Abishev and pole master Mikael Bres all mind-boggling to watch. The non-stop hyperactive music, led by Sxip Shirey on harmonica, guitar and amazing microphone sound fx, also features banjo, percussion and a ubiquitous euphonium.

In contrast, from Montreal, Vague de Cirque's *Carousel and Clotheline*, led by hand balancing duo Alain Boudreau and Noemie Gervaise, is as raggedy as it is highly skilled. Not exactly anti-circus, it enjoys being unfussy, opening with the performers unready, scrambling for their costumes (hence the clothesline) before they begin a succession of stunts – juggling, tumbling, and an extraordinary contortionist putting on shoes while doing the splits. The cloud swing and trapeze acts are astonishing, as are the acrobats – two holding a narrow Russian bar across their shoulders, while a third does a series of vertiginous back flips.

Glory Box is new to Adelaide but Burlesque Hour artist, Moira Finucane is not. Surrounded by wolf-girl Lily Paskas, disco queen Yana Alana (the vocally brilliant Sarah Ward) and fellow divas Jessica Wong, Lilikoi Kaos and Holly Durant, Finucane inhabits a zone that crosses drag, performance art, striptease, glamour and parody. Wherever it is, it a no-man's-land. *Glory Box* satirically subverts the male gaze and the result is startling, funny and exhilarating - especially to the legion of female fans in the audience.

Moira Finucane is as brilliant as ever, reprising her vintage solos – the blood-soup lasciviously spooned from a bowl and drooled on to her white satin dress, her Dairy Queen, spraying milk from two-litre paps all over the front row patrons cowering under specially provided plastic sheets, and, dressed in her scarlet spiked bikini, the gargantuan balloon bursting finale. *Glory Box* is an entertainment package like no other.

Theatre is abundant in the Fringe. With more than 120 listings, there are many companies of all kinds engaged in the Darwinian struggle to find audiences. This has deterred international and interstate companies in recent times and this year even the leading local independent companies are less well represented.

Each year Holden Street Theatres hosts recent high profile works from Edinburgh. This time their sponsored event is *Bitch Boxer* from UK company Snuff Box. Written by Charlotte Josephine and featuring Holly Augustine as Chloe, a restless twenty year old with ambitions to compete in the London Olympics, the first time women's boxing is included in the program. It is an uneven text, but the portrait of a young woman in grief at the death of her father, also her protector and sports trainer, is poignant - especially as she learns only gradually when to throw a punch and when to pull one.

Also at Holden Street is *A Special Day*. Adapted from the 1977 Italian film by Etto Scola by Mexican company, Por Piedad Teatro, it features Ana Graham and Antonio Vega as a two lonely apartment tenants, watching from their windows as Mussolini's Italy begins to simmer. Freshly staged with décor mostly provided by improvised chalk drawings, *A Special Day* is a special experience.

As is *Albert Einstein - Relativitively Speaking*, a musical lecture based on the famous General Theory of Relativity. With witty songs (accompanied on the Einsteinway by Jo Eagle) and a general unwillingness to dumb down the details, writer and exuberant performer John Hinton has made Einstein even more fascinating and relativity absolutely engaging.

With so much scheduled, especially with the Festival now fully underway, impossible time clashes are inevitable, and there are some excellent productions I am yet to see. From the UK, *The Bunker Trilogy*, three plays set in the trenches of World War I, but featuring literary legends - Agamemnon, Macbeth and (from the Arthurian cycle) Morgana Le Fay, is playing at The Bunker in Marlborough Street. They have already won Fringe awards and are highly recommended. As is I Might Be Edgar Allan Poe, a welcome return by the talented Dawson Nichols (at The Bakehouse next week) and, replacing UK Fringe regular, Guy Masterson's now-cancelled *Anthems for Doomed Youth*, a return of *The Event*, an intriguing short play by John Clancy, performed by Bob Paisley from March 5 - 16 at the Kevin Crease Studios in Tynte Street.

Also not to be missed are new works from two sparky independent Adelaide companies - *You Wanna Talk About it*, an interactive project at the German Club by Isthisyours? Company, and *Notoriously Yours*, a noir thriller on spying and surveillance by Van Badham, presented by Five.Point.One, featuring Brad Williams, Claire Glenn, Craig Behenna and Matt Crook, also at Channel 9 Kevin Crease Studios.

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Adelaide Festival 2014

Published: 2014-03-06 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

The Daily Review

Adelaide Festival : Theatre, Local and Large

Murray Bramwell

The Adelaide Festival has been open for a week and already the theatre program has been terrific. First up was the State Theatre Company's fine production, directed by Geordie Brookman, of Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull*. Hilary Bell's brisk, unfussy adaptation set the tone for a lively, accessible version of this masterwork. Staged in the company's scenic workshop, lit and designed by the always inventive Geoff Cobham, Brookman navigates the wild mood swings between comedy and heartbreak which make the play both rich and daunting.

Xavier Samuel, in his first mainstage work since his busy film career began, is memorable as the highly-strung Konstantin - part Hamlet, part emo - who, like everyone else in the play, is hopelessly in love with the wrong person. In his case it is Nina (Lucy Fry) who only has eyes for the novelist Trigorin.

Rosalba Clemente and Renato Musolino play Arkadina and Trigorin, the overbearing drop-in Moscow celebrities who leave angst in their wake, while the locals, trying to keep a grip on their disappointments, are vividly presented by Paul Blackwell (Sorin), Terence Crawford (Dorn) and Matilda Bailey (Masha) among others in this strong cast. With music links on ukulele from Matthew Gregan (who also plays Medvedenko) this study in human folly, regret and pathos is another success for State under Geordie Brookman's direction.

Adelaide's Windmill Theatre has been on a winning run in the past several years, especially with success in the 2012 Festival and then extended interstate seasons of the much-loved *School Dance*. Festival director David Sefton has this year programmed a Trilogy for Windmill – return performances of *Fugitive* (which debuted in 2010) and *School Dance*, as well as premiering *Girl Asleep*. All three plays are by Matthew Whittet whose zany, closely-observed studies of the vagaries of adolescence have been expertly staged by Windmill director Rosemary Myers, in league with the unmistakable 70s kitsch design signatures of Jonathan Oxlade, Richard Vabre's technicolour lighting and the retro-pop and cinematic soundscapes conjured by audio wizards, Luke Smiles and Andrew Howard. *Girl Asleep*, loosely based on the Sleeping Beauty fable, is about Greta Driscoll, turning fifteen and in misery that life isn't as simple as plastic horses and music boxes. Instead she has parents who are Martians (actually they *are* pretty alien) and friends – like the Hunter twins – who are trolls. Even very best friend Elliot gets on her wick.

Ellen Steele is excellent as Greta, by turns demure and turbulent, she is a convincing mid-teen. Eamon Farren is likeable as the constant Elliot, Jude Henshall bristly as the fractious sister Genevieve who's nuts about Serge Gainsbourg and, as Conrad, the father, Matthew Whittet is a well-meaning dag in fawn shorts and mutton chops. Amber McMahon, a sensation in *School Dance*, covers a farrago of hilarious comic characters from mother Janet to Greta the Finnish pen friend. *Girl Asleep* is vibrant and fun, but it also a touching account of a young girl realising that her childhood is now a world elsewhere.

Fugitive, Whittet's fresh take on the Robin Hood legend has the hero (Eamon Farren) returning to his jilted ex-girlfriend Marian (Kate Cheel) and best friend Wil (Whittet at his earnest best) . With new recruit, bovver boy, Little John (the irresistibly funny Patrick Graham) the merry crew do battle with the lady Sheriff Marty (Carmel Johnson) and her wicked henchmen, depicted here as Star Wars Stormtroopers.

Things get complicated when Robin starts to enjoy this droogy ultra-violence rather much and, as in all good legends, the return of a king-like person (Danielle Catanzariti) is needed to restore order. *Fugitive* is a rollicking tale with fights, dancing, slapstick and jokes. This production is another Windmill turn that has audiences gawping and grinning.

Blackout, commissioned for this festival and performed in the AC Arts Main Theatre, is the latest work from Stone/Castro. Eight people are heading out to sea to celebrate a wedding but, in this volatile production, the Love Boat quickly turns into a Ship of Fools. The captain of the vessel (Vincent Crowley) predicts that it will be a special occasion for the happy couple, but perhaps nothing quite this special.

The bridesmaid (Jo Stone), sister to the bride, is drunk, the father of the bride (Stephen Sheehan) has returned after five years in an Indian ashram professing inner contentment but radiates only anger and intolerance, a visiting Portuguese dancer (John Romao) is smitten with the groom, and the waitress (Charlotte Rose) has a psychotic hatred of dogs and ridicules the musician, known as Desert Lizard (Nathan O'Keefe) who spends so long introducing himself he never gets round to performing.

While this work has a strong colloquially Australian text, its influences and references are those of the European avant garde – the surrealism of Bunuel, the absurdism of Ionesco. This could be an ocker version of *The Exterminating Angel*, or the not-so-discreet charm of the lower bourgeoisie. It is abrasive,disconcerting, and chaotic. The groom (Alisdair Macindoe) is a quivering wreck – his seizure like dance sequence is extraordinary to watch, as is the concluding solo by the bride (Larissa McGowan) lying in a shallow pool of water. Meanwhile the wedding party clambers ignominiously back to shore.

Director and writer, Paulo Castro and his collaborator Jo Stone have created a work that is macabrely funny as well as painfully confronting. Sometimes the pace of the production is lost but that only adds to the excruciation. *Blackout* is a provocative work, skilfully performed with an ominous set and lighting by Morag Cook and Ben Flett. It is a voyage into perilous waters in more ways than one, but its uneasy effects remain long after landfall.

Festivals often have a centrepiece work and this year it is undoubtedly the Netherlands company, Toneelgroep Amsterdam's extraordinary production *Roman Tragedies*. Director Ivo van Hove has taken three of Shakespeare's Roman plays – *Coriolanus, Julius Caesar and Antony* and *Cleopatra* and seamlessly integrated them into 5 hours 45 minutes of gripping theatre.

Designer Jan Versweyveld turned the Festival Theatre stage into a combination broadcasting studio and - with dozens of low set Ikea style divans - hotel lounge. Amongst the seating are raised platforms for actors' performances and above them large circular lampshades keeping the area almost always fully lit. There are monitor screens everywhere and at the proscenium is a huge screen for a continuous hi def video feed and surtitles.

Among the many innovative and refreshing aspects of the production is the freedom for the audience. Most notably we are invited to sit on stage, an invitation taken up by several hundred at a time- people sitting, standing, crouched on the floor, watching the actors perform at close proximity directly, or through the monitors. Drinks are served from a bar onstage and people are encouraged to tweet messages about the show and take photographs. There are no intervals but scene changes of up to nine minutes are announced and we are able to get up and walk around, chat and generally recharge. It is a welcome change from the rigorous decorum often associated with a fourth wall theatre performance.

Driven by rapid video edits, breaking news LED crawl updates and, to indicate battle scenes, sustained bursts of blisteringly loud drumming and clashing cymbals, *Roman Tragedies* is intense. The continuity is dazzling and the emotional and thematic intensity unremitting. It is like guzzling through DVDs of series television the way we now do – hoovering up box sets of *Borgen* or *House of Cards* or *Game of Thrones.*

But none of this high octane staging detracts from the excellence of the acting. For all the technological high definition, the play is still the thing- and the performances are outstanding. As Coriolanus, Gijs Scholten van Aschat explodes in haughty contempt for the citizens he is supposed to govern and we watch as his pride - and his oedipal fear of his mother - bring about his downfall. As Brutus, in *Julius Caesar*, Roeland Fernhout is drawn into a conspiracy which begins as a just cause and deteriorates into a wolvish struggle for power.

Spanning the last two plays, Hans Kesting is splendid as Mark Antony – rallying the crowd in his oration to the dead Caesar and then, fatally attracted and tragically enmeshed with Cleopatra (Chris Nietvelt) in a love affair that brings down on them the wrath of an empire. So many performances are extraordinary – Frieda Pittoors as Volumnia, Marieke Heebink as Cassius, Bart Slegers as Aufidius fending off TV interviewers and, then as the steadfast Enobarbus, abandoning Mark Antony he literally runs out of the theatre. The video feed follows him, as he stands in the traffic on King William Street delivering his agonised speech of defeat.

Modernising Shakespeare is not a new thing. In his famous 1937 version of *Julius Caesar* Orson Welles used a media pack and contemporary references – at that time, the rise of fascism in Italy and Germany. But Toneelgroep Amsterdam and director Ivo van Hove have brought such intelligence, thematic complexity and theatrical clarity to this production it becomes a new benchmark. *Roman Tragedies* is drama at its most satisfying.

Published online The Daily Review, March 7, 2014.

O dream of joy this departure is indeed a spellbinding voyage through sight and sound

Published: 2014-03-12 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Adelaide Festival Music Theatre

O dream of joy this departure is indeed, a spellbinding voyage through sight and sound

Rime of the Ancient Mariner The Tiger Lillies. Her Majesty's Theatre , 58 Grote Street. Duration 1 hours 30 minutes March 12. Tickets $ 30 - $ 79 Bookings : BASS 131 246 or adelaidefestival.com.au Until March 14.

One of the great narrative poems in English literature, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, written in 1797 by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, is a gripping tale of misadventure and doom. It is a nightmare life-in-death account of a sailor, who after impulsively shooting an albatross, brings supernatural vengeance on his ship and crew. The tribulations of the mariner are like a voyage to hell and he lives only to penitentially repeat his tale.

UK group The Tiger Lillies, along with animator and photographer, Mark Holthusen, have not just adapted Coleridge's poem, they have keelhauled it. The result is a mind-bending ninety minutes of visual and musical phantasmagoria. Led by songwriter and vocalist Martyn Jacques on accordion and piano, fellow Tiger Lillies , Adrian Stout (on contra bass, theremin and musical saw) and percussionist Mike Pickering, navigate a seamless, sometimes relentless, score that has the mordant detachment and bitter humour of Weimar cabaret. .

Dressed in cream dungarees and cloth caps, the musicians, with garish white and rouge faces and black-ringed eyes, are like sinister clowns - especially Jacques, the baleful narrator. Singing in his snarling near-falsetto, he has replaced Coleridge's Wedding Guest with Brecht and Weill's Mack the Knife.

The songs, accompanied by woozy theremin, jaunty accordion and high hat drum are a mix of styles – polka, ballad, shanty, swing, slow blues and funeral march - with echoes of Tom Waits, the Divine Comedy and even, that other boat song aficionado, Nick Cave. The three *Albatross* songs are haunting, *Water Water* is an eerie lament, and the monstrous visions of *Palace by the Sea* are vivid. But not everything works – *Hypocrites* is jarring, and *Cabin Boys* needlessly casts the Mariner as depraved rather than, in the original, a man who suffers catastrophe for a single error of judgement. That said, Martyn Jacques' jagged lyrics are a bold departure from Coleridge's sonorous rhymes, retaining familiar fragments of the original but only fleetingly.

In this production the main narrative is visual. Mark Holthusen's extraordinary design envelops the musicians with a huge projection screen behind them and a gauze curtain in front, on to which appears a continuous surge of images and apparitions.

It is like a giant Victorian pop-up book with curly waves, ice floes, sailing ships and increasingly gargantuan sea serpents. The albatross is a rudimentary stringed marionette given pathos by its simplicity. Then Holthusen adds the most sophisticated digital photography to create wraith-like sailors, or the diaphanous Death Maiden with lace and streaming hair. This spellbinding combination of sight and sound holds us as surely as the Mariner's own telling.

Murray Bramwell

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Mind-altering voyagers

Published: 2014-03-15 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Adelaide Festival Theatre

Mind-altering voyagers

Needles and Opium Written and directed by Robert Lepage Ex Machina Duration 1 hours 45 minutes March 15.

Created by Quebecois director Robert Lepage, *Needles and Opium*, last performed in 1992, has been recently revived and ambitiously redesigned. Like other Lepage creations (including previous Adelaide Festival triumphs, *The Dragons Trilogy* in 1988 and *The Seven Streams of the River Ota* ten years later) it threads disparate elements to create unexpected thematic and emotional connections.

Here, the needles refer to legendary jazz trumpeter Miles Davis and his heroin addiction during the late 1940s and early 50s; the opium signals the career and writings of Jean Cocteau, opium user, poet, dramatist and film director, most famous for *Orpheus, Beauty and the Beast* and *Les Enfants Terribles.*

The link is the year 1949, when Davis flew to Paris for an international jazz festival where, unlike Jim Crow America, he was feted by the French. He met poets, philosophers and, most notably, the singer Juliette Greco. At the same time Cocteau visited New York, fascinated by its energy and appalled by its puritanical fear of the imagination.

A third character, Robert, originally performed (as was Cocteau) by Lepage, is a Canadian voice-over actor, in Paris in 1989, working on a film documentary about Davis and Greco. Retelling their ill-fated story triggers a crisis for Robert, himself heart-broken by a failed relationship.

Ambitiously staged, the design consists of a large three-sided cube which rotates on its axis. Suspended by wires, the performers (actor Marc Labreche and acrobat Wellesley Robertson III) operate in a playing space which, with the use of splendid visual projections, often incorporating period photographs, fluently morphs from hotel rooms, to cityscapes to the offices of Life magazine. It is moving in every sense and further evidence of Lepage's imaginative invention . It is also perilously intricate; on opening night a technical fault forced the performance to be abandoned.

Labreche is excellent as Robert, bringing poignancy to his emotional desolation, and, despite a heavy, sometimes hastily delivered, French accent, his portrait of Cocteau is vividly theatrical. Robertson's Davis is balletic but silent, speaking only with his music - long flourishes of *Birth of Cool*-era Miles which are as thrilling and lyrical as they were in 1949.

Murray Bramwell

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Film star’s guide to creaturely sex

Published: 2014-03-15 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Adelaide Festival Theatre

Film star’s guide to creaturely sex

Green Porno Isabella Rossellini Text by Isabella Rossellini and Jean-Claude Carriere Translated by Julia Groopman Her Majesty’s Theatre, 58 Grote Street. Duration 1 hour 15 minutes March 12. Touring other Australian cities in March.

“I am a method actress,” declares Isabella Rossellini, star of catwalk and screen, “and I like to slide into the skin of animals.” *Green Porno*, a closing attraction in the final weekend of the Adelaide Festival, opens up new vistas as Rossellini stands at her lectern delivering a show about the weird and even weirder world of animal sexuality.

Looking over her bookish spectacles, our narrator reassures us that her subject is not pornography but it is obscene, and depending on our proclivities, perhaps erotic. I don’t think the delighted audience thought it was either, rather, it is an energetic, shrewdly-framed panegyric to biodiversity.

Originating as a series of short films produced for Robert Redford’s Sundance TV Channel, *Green Porno* features the impish Rossellini in colourful animated vignettes, mingling in oceans, swamps and on land, zanily dressed as earthworms, mother ducks, mantises and hamsters, all involved in a bewildering variety of evolutionary behaviours from asexual cloning to eating their surplus young.

Rossellini’s genial presence is crucial to the success of the presentation which could easily have coasted on a series of amusing video skits. The lecture is serious in its intentions, just as Rossellini, who went back to university to learn more about her subject, brings the enthusiasm of a researcher to the enterprise. It is like watching David Attenborough, uncannily resembling Ingrid Bergman dressed as a hamster, explaining parturition and courtship rituals. Charles Darwin presides importantly over the occasion. Citing his theories of natural selection and sexual selection, Rossillini reminds us that male peacocks may not be dressed for their everyday habitat but they make a fetching sight on the dance floor. There are plenty of fascinating factoids; how “sneaky” males, those weedy specimens among the elephant seals, hide among the female harem for an opportunistic leg-over, about the headbanging erotomania of toads, and - illustrated by tape measure- the penile dimensions of the animal world. Spoiler alert: barnacles are impressive, gorillas surprisingly modest.

In all this natural history the notion of something being “against nature” is given new scrutiny. From polymorphously perverse dolphins to the gender changing *crepidula fornicata*, Isabella Rossellini has a life-affirming exhibit for every occasion.

Murray Bramwell

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Roman Tragedies to Faunacation

Published: 2014-03-18 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Daily Review Adelaide Festival

Roman Tragedies to Faunacation

Three days into the new week and, in Adelaide, it feels like the circus has left town. After four hyperactive weeks, the Fringe, manifest in every nook, cranny, park and temporary performing space, has dismantled, Writers Week has had its seven days, Womadelaide is long gone from Botanic Park, the ubiquitous orange Clipsal 500 road barriers and many tonnes of scaffolding have gradually defenestrated and, last weekend David Sefton's excellent Adelaide Festival also came to its conclusion.

His second program has had many successes and, improving strongly on his debut last year, has raised high hopes for 2015. This year saw a number of his signatures repeated – especially with avant garde and coterie contemporary music, although the dance program was thinner and for some, marquee event, the Israeli Batsheva Company was a mixed experience.

The theatre offerings – one person shows: SKaGen's *BigMouth*, *An Iliad*, and the loquaciously witty, cult film maker, John Waters, drew warm responses as did local productions -State Theatre's *The Seagull*, Windmill Theatre's exuberantly creative Trilogy of Matthew Whittet plays (including the now widely celebrated *School Dance*) and *Blackout*, the intriguingly surreal theatre/dance work from Stone/Castro.

The standout, of course, was the *Roman Tragedies*, all six hours of adapted Shakespeare commandingly performed with multimedia virtuosity by Toneelgroep Amsterdam. It often only takes one great event to make a milestone festival and, like Cricot 2's *Dead Class* in 1978, Pina Bausch in 1982, The Rustaveli Company in 1986, and Peter Brook's *The Mahabharata* in 1988, the *Roman Tragedies* has become an Adelaide Festival you-had-to-be-there classic.

Sefton's program this time also had a cornerstone musical event - the impressive four night residency by New York composer and musician John Zorn. Last year's festival theme, built around the Brooklyn, New York Brassland recording scene, was an interesting but unsatisfactory mishmash. John Zorn has been quite a different matter. It is hard to think of a more perfect focus , a musician and composer so prolific and diverse that he can become a festival all of his own. Gathering thirty seven musicians, as well as the Adelaide Symphony around him, Zorn played four nights of widely divergent compositions, all his own – classical works with orchestra , a triple bill made up of cinema themes, the free jazz octet Cobra, and a trio enticingly named Bladerunner, then there was Zorn@60, a mixed bill including vocal compositions reprised from his New York birthday celebration, and, opening the series, his Masada Marathon.

His Masada Book dates back to the early 1990's when Zorn set about writing 100 compositions based on Jewish and klezmer themes. Like all of Zorn's energetic enterprises, the project expanded to over 200 pieces for various instrumentations – some of which featured in his opening night four hour marathon.

From the opening hard bop set from the Masada Quartet, featuring trumpeter Greg Cohen and Zorn spraying unbelievably beautiful discords from his saxophone, to the solo recitals on cello (Erik Friedlander) and piano (Uri Caine) it was a remarkable night of music. Mycal , four women vocalists, performed dazzlingly intricate a capella works, keyboard luminary John Medeski's trio played jazz fusion (with the brilliant Kenny Woolesen on drums) and hardcore metal band Abraxas unleashed the kind of avant garde rock that Zorn has explored since his *Naked City* days in the 1980s.

None of this would have been so appealing if not for Zorn's enthusiastic presence, constantly encouraging the musicians, beaming at their extraordinary accomplishment. When not performing himself, he often sat on a chair between the musicians using what seemed like Kermit the Frog hand gestures to conduct, modulate and co-ordinate bursts of solo invention from guitarist and former Lounge Lizard Marc Ribot, violinist Mark Feldman, favourite percussionist Cyro Baptista and electronics architect Ikue Mori.

Wandering the stage in a red t-shirt, camouflage pants and combat boots, Zorn looked like more like a roadie, or a thirty-something programmer from Silicon Valley. But he is sixty and he is a major American composer whose commitment drew some of the finest contemporary musicians to perform here. David Sefton marvelled to me that prominent producer and bassist Bill Laswell flew from Los Angeles just to play a thirty minute set. Zorn himself declared the festival the best he has ever attended. Well, he made it so, as Zorn fans who came from all over the country would heartily agree.

Theatre in the final week also finished strongly with an emphasis on visual invention. UK company, The Tiger Lillies, led by composer Martyn Jacques brought their piratical version of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* for a short season at Her Majesty's.

Performing eighteen songs, which use only fleetingly familiar scraps from Coleridge's majestic narrative, this lugubrious trio – Jacques on accordion and piano, Adrian Stout, on bass and ethereal theremin, and Mike Pickering on percussion – look like denizens from some kind of nautical clown hell. Face smeared in white, eyes reduced to black splodges, in his sometimes-trying near falsetto, Jacques grimly sings his mordant tale of the mariner who impulsively kills an albatross and brings doom and ruin on his ship and crew.

The Tigers Lillies stand behind a gauze curtain and in front of a large screen displaying the visual mastery of designer Mark Holthussen. Using a ragout of styles from 19th century pop-up books to sophisticated 3-D digital effects, the stage is swirling with foam crests and ice floes, seething with sea serpents, sirens, and vengeful storms, and unsettling us with the wraith like hologram realism of the ship's crew and the Death Maiden. These figments of the mariner's fevered imagination become startlingly our own.

Robert Lepage and his Ex Machina company are no strangers to the Adelaide Festival, his early work, *The Dragon's Trilogy*, an epic set in Toronto, was a highlight to rival Peter Brook's *Mahabharata* in the 1988 festival; equally memorable was the *Seven Streams of the River Ota* in Robyn Archer's program a decade later. *Needles and Opium* is not a new Lepage work, it played in the Sydney Festival in 1992, but it has been substantially redesigned using current stage technology and now features actor Marc Labreche in the roles previous performed by Lepage himself.

The needles and opium signify two very different artists – Miles Davis and Jean Cocteau. Always looking to intertwine the apparently unconnected, Lepage fastens on the year 1949 when Davis went to Paris to perform for the first time and found, not the racist harassment of the United States, but a café society of artists and intellectuals ready to greet and proclaim him. It was then that he met and fell in love with singer Juliette Greco, only to end the relationship because of the difficulties of a mixed race relationship in the US at that time.

In the same year Jean Cocteau, poet, film director (*Beauty and the Beast*, *Orpheus*) and opium addict, was making his journey in the opposite direction - from Paris to New York, a wildly mixed experience he wrote about in his published *Letter to the Americans*. There is a further link, and it is the heart of the play, and that is the fictional 1989 visit to Paris by a voice-over actor, Robert. He is in pain, trying to recover from the end of a relationship, but becoming increasingly paralysed by grief and self-doubt. Working on a documentary film about the star-crossed Greco and Davis triggers his breakdown.

The staging of *Needles and Opium* is spectacular. Performing in a large three sided cube which rotates at various vertiginous angles, the actors – Labreche as Robert and Cocteau, and dancer/acrobat Wellesley Robertson III, who represents Miles Davis - frequently use harnesses and elaborately angular stage movements as the topsy turvy acting space is transformed by visual projections (including archival photos from the late 40s) which magically dress the set and then melt away to be replaced by further astonishing images.

It is a remarkable technical achievement and, it transpired, a high risk one. On first night a technical fault brought the performance to a halt around the seventy minute mark and the event was cancelled. Labreche is excellent, especially as Robert, whose sadness and disorientation, tenderly written by Lepage, is genuinely depicted. The highly theatrical Cocteau is wittily played but with his heavy accent, the clipped delivery was at times difficult to follow.

Robertson has no speaking lines as Davis, Lepage imagines him, not so much *In a Silent Way* perhaps, but as the voice of jazz. Miming to trumpet solos (recreated by Craig L Pederson) the production reminds us of the majestic sounds of Miles Davis, not only *The Birth of Cool* and the bright fire of his bebop sound, but the personal tribulation in the making his brilliant film score for the aptly named *Ascenseur pour L'echafaud* – the Lift to the Scaffold.

Closing the festival was the whimsically disarming *Green Porno*. Delivered as a lecture-with-illustrations by celebrated actor and former model, Isabella Rossellini, *Green Porno* is a funny and curiously informative probe into the hidden world of animal sexuality. Porno of course it is not – fauna-cation perhaps – rather it is a celebration of biodiversity and a robust reminder that Charles Darwin's theories of natural selection have much more to tell us than that anti-scientific oxymoron, intelligent design.

Using a series of short video features first made for Robert Redford's Sundance TV channel, Rossellini, with a light wit and a touch of conspiracy with the women in the audience, describes the weird, elaborate, sometimes grandiose manifestations of male creature sexuality and the clever ways by which the female species can thwart unwanted or genetically undesirable consequences. So we learn, watching Rossellini, transmogrified in her comically animated films into a mother duck with passageways in her vaginas to sideline the sperm of unwanted suitors, a starfish cloning herself from a broken stem, a hermaphrodite snail and a blowfly laying eggs in a human skull. Assisted by her retractable tape measure Rosselini also considers the penile dimensions of barnacles, gorillas, giraffes and blue whales and the gender bending versatility of the seahorse.

Standing at her lectern, Rossellini looks over her specs to inform us with both irony and scientific authority that the natural world is to be treasured and marvelled at. And in response to the view that some human behaviour is "against nature" and for that reason to be condemned, she enthusiastically cites the bisexuality of dolphins and the sex-changing virtuosity of the *crepidula fornicata*. *Green Porno* is playing capital cities until March 26. It is a life lesson to enjoy.

Murray Bramwell

Published online at Daily Review as "Roman Tragedies to Faunacation" March 19, 2014.

Companies willing to take risks put vibrant creativity centrestage

Published: 2015-02-19 *Adelaide Fringe*

Adelaide Fringe 2015

Cut by Duncan Graham Presented by Hannah Norris Holden Street Theatres. Until March 14.

Mush and Me by Karla Crome Lip Sink Theatre Holden Street Theatres. Until March 15.

Destroyer of Worlds by Caleb Lewis Rock Surfers Theatre Company Tuxedo Cat, 54 Hyde Street. Until February 28. Bookings : adelaidefringe.com Fringetix phone : 1300 621 255.

The Fringe in Adelaide is misnamed. It doesn't skirt the edges of the city, it envelopes it. For four weeks the CBD is buzzing and everyone is off to see something. The program bulges progressively bigger – last year 970 events, this year 1,058. Venues get ever busier – The Garden of Unearthly Delights at Rymill Park and the enlarged Royal Croquet Club in Victoria Square – and long queues gather to see stand-up comics and grunge burlesque.

Theatre in the Adelaide Fringe is a high risk venture and, in the Darwinian struggle to find audiences, talented companies can sometimes be left demoralised and out of pocket. All the more reason, then, to salute and celebrate the vibrant creativity that so many bring to this festival.

At Holden Street Theatres, the enterprising Martha Lott has again assembled a program of local, interstate and international shows. Adelaide playwright Duncan Graham's Cut, a Hitchcockian thriller, featuring the excellent Hannah Norris, with nifty design by Elizabeth Gadsby, plays in a small room to a full house of eighteen. A young flight attendant looking into a mirror has a premonition of danger before a flight. For sixty brisk minutes we sit through sensory deprivation blackouts, sound immersion and aircraft safety drills until, tautly directed by Graham, her story - of the man with eyes like ashes - cuts to the intriguingly ambiguous chase.

Mush and Me, a recent success from the Edinburgh Fringe, is one of several productions sponsored by Martha Lott to perform in Adelaide. Directed by Rosy Banham, this UK two-hander, deftly written by Karla Crome, features Jaz Deol as Mush and Danielle Isaacs as Gabby, two young telemarketers who start to fancy each other. Their desks are adjacent, but they are bridging a large divide: he's Muslim, she's Jewish - and each, in their way, is devout and dutiful.

Described by the company as "a tale of faith, family and bacon butties", Mush and Me is richly observed and warmly acted. It is funny and tender, but also about cultural barricades and very inconvenient truths. At a time when historical enmities have deepened and rhetoric has sharpened, this bright, splendidly performed play plausibly imagines new possibilities.

In a different key, Destroyer of Worlds, from inventive Caleb Lewis and Rock Surfers Theatre Company, is about Lewis's breakup with his Drama School girlfriend, Lauren. No first names are changed to protect the innocent and even the author's mum is interviewed on video for her p.o.v.

Many worlds collide here – Godzilla actor Haruo Nakajima appears as a character, as does Robert Oppenheimer, father of the atomic bomb. It's a long bow to the detonation of an Adelaide romance but, as Lewis candidly (and poignantly) reminds us, that's how it feels when the earth stops moving. With lively performances from Rebecca Mayo and Phil Spencer, and some gruff authorial intrusions from the playwright, Destroyer of Worlds is a brand-new Fringe treasure.

Murray Bramwell

"Companies willing to take risks put vibrant creativity centrestage" The Australian, February 19, 2015, p.16.

Memories are hit and miss

Published: 2015-02-24 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Adelaide Festival

Memories are hit and miss

Beckett Triptych: Footfalls, Eh Joe and Krapp's Last Tape by Samuel Beckett State Theatre Company of South Australia Scenic Workshop and Rehearsal Room Adelaide Festival Centre. February 24. Tickets: $ 31 - $ 69 Bookings : adelaidefestival.com.au BASS 131246. Until March 15.

Jean Paul Sartre said that hell is other people, but for Samuel Beckett it is much closer to home. "You know that penny farthing hell you call your mind", says the scathingly reproachful woman's voice in *Eh Joe*, "That's where you think this is coming from, don't you ?" For Beckett's characters, consciousness is a prison and memory a rebuke, and if being inside your own head is not hell, then it is certainly a form of purgatory.

In State Theatre Company's excellent Adelaide Festival Beckett program - their triptych, with side panels, *Eh Joe* and *Footfalls,* and *Krapp's Last Tape* as centrepiece - the themes of fading recollection and inconsolable regret are foremost.

Performed in the Rehearsal Room and Scenic Workshop in the lower depths of the Festival Centre, these three works remind us of the spare, poetic intensity of Beckett's shorter works. Tautly directed by Corey McMahon, and subtly lit by Chris Petridis, *Eh Joe*, originally written for television in 1965, depicts a man in a dressing gown retreating into a shuttered bedroom only to find a woman's voice (Pamela Rabe) taunting him with memories of his cruelties to past lovers, including one who suicides.

Joe, splendidly played by Paul Blackwell, sits motionless on the bed while a camera edges slowly closer, sending a live video feed on to a scrim screen across the stage. His face and eyes loom ever larger as the enormity of his transgression is revealed.

Footfalls is a dialogue between a woman, May (Pamela Rabe) and her unseen elderly mother (expertly voiced by Sandy Gore). Like a penitent in Limbo, May trudges from one side of the stage to the other –"seven, eight, nine, wheel" while her mother's voice beckons and demands. Dressed in Victorian Gothic grey, Pamela Rabe memorably redefines quiet desperation. Geordie Brookman's direction carefully confines the action, as does Ben Flett's chiaroscuro lighting.

Krapp's Last Tape is a Beckett favourite with a brilliantly simple premise. Krapp, now aged 69 is looking back on his life at 39, trying to fathom his earlier self. Using a reel-to-reel tape recorder, he plays old spools documenting his thoughts on life and love, only to discover he does not recognise or remember.

Directed by Nescha Jelk and featuring veteran actor Peter Carroll, this segment is a more mixed success. Ailsa Paterson's rag and bone décor, with towering heaps of old furniture, fills the cavernous stage area in the Scenic Workshop but it dwarfs and distracts from the central focus – a table, an overhead light, and an old man pondering his fragmented life. Peter Carroll's distinctive voice invigorates the recordings, but as Krapp in real time, his alienation is sometimes too quizzical to engage us. That said, *Beckett Triptych* is a winning opener to the festival.

Murray Bramwell

"Memories are hit and miss" The Australian, February 27, 2015, p.14.

Around the Fringe in Adelaide

Published: 2015-02-27 *Adelaide Fringe*

Murray Bramwell

Now two weekends into a four week season, the Adelaide Fringe continues to expand. In its amorphous, uncurated way it grows ever more confident and inclusive and the citizens love it. Even before the calendar page has officially turned to “Mad March” the city is feeling festive. The nights are warm, and everyone is out strolling to bars, cafes, eateries - and to see a show.

There is plenty to choose from. Adelaide has the second biggest Fringe outside Edinburgh, and like its Scottish older sibling, it has been going more than forty years. And, again, this year’s program with over a thousand listed events is the biggest yet. It is also the fastest selling, with the highest box office - and so on. The Fringe, it seems, is like the Magic Pudding.

There are venues scattered across the city. Holden Street Theatres at Hindmarsh, The Bakehouse in Angas Street, Tuxedo Cat in Hyde Street, La Boheme in Grote Street, The Rhino Room on Frome – the A-Z of venues runs to 379 listings. A favourite, now in its eleventh year of operation, is The Garden of Unearthly Delights in Rundle Park in the East End. With its carny fairground bustle and punter-friendly program, it shrewdly mixes familiar acts - TV celebs and established comic favourites- with cabaret and nouveau circus shows which have wit, flair and an enticingly darker purpose.

Company 2, whose show *Cantina* has deservedly become something of a classic, has returned this year with a new work, *Scotch and Soda*. With a raucous Rum Corps visual style, it provides another demi-monde context for the theatrical invention of company directors Chelsea McGuffin and David Carberry, the gymnastic prowess of Mozes, and features percussionist and composer, Ben Walsh with the Crusty Suitcase Band

Performing in the gilded glass surrounds of the Aurora Spiegeltent, this motley crew in scruffy militaria burst into brassy syncopation while the acrobats stand on tables - and each others shoulders, three high. Chelsea McGuffin, in one of her signature stunts, walks on top of wine bottles before joining the saturnine Mozes (sporting a beard like a dead squirrel) on the trapeze for a series of eye-popping manoeuvres suspended only by their ankles and our disbelief.

It is fast paced, zany and, at times, contemplative. Inside a scrim tent McGuffin gently guides three little green budgies on to a music stand and twirls them upside down while Ben Walsh plays sweet melodies on a hammered dulcimer. There is trick cycling, Mozes does another trapeze solo, McGuffin demolishes Carberry in a tumbling contest with more than a hint of subtext, and the whole ensemble flip each other from springboards in ever more alarming ways. *Scotch and Soda* is still finding its shape but, with terrific music and Company 2’s exceptional talent, it is a very likeable dram.

Making a third consecutive return to the Garden is the Strut and Fret production, *Limbo* and it is better than ever. Directed by Scott Maidment, it is an outstanding example of the wave of innovative Australian circus cabaret which has evolved since the days of Rock and Roll Circus, Circus Oz and many others. With frizz haired MC, Sxip Shirey’s unrelenting beatbox voice fx and harmonica, supported by musicians Grant Arthur and Mick Stuart on banjo, percussion and a host of other instruments, *Limbo* glides from one bedazzling spectacle to another.

Contortionist Aurelia Oudot articulates himself like a human mantis, while pole master Mikael Bres and tap dancer Hilton Denis add to the energy. Hand balancer Danik Abishev only gets more extraordinary each time he performs and Coney Island star, Heather Holliday, sword and light-saber swallower, as well as fire eater, is fearless and peerless. There is never a lull with *Limbo*, every exit, every entrance, every cue and scene shift is carefully choreographed. It is magic to watch.

Fear and Delight is a new work also from Strut and Fret. Shrouded in mystery, the show is in three parts. The Complete Experience includes “a sensual journey where ground-breaking theatre is matched with delicious drinks and a designer menu by internationally renowned food architects Didier Prince and Roy Wiggers.” The after party is at the DJ dancefloor of The Devil’s Lighthouse with more “curated” cocktails.

Maybe the food architecture is the key to this event, or maybe it creates a cocktail Stockholm Effect for the audience. I only went to The Show, the performance part after the food and before the Lighthouse. The Show consisted of a forty minute wait while masked ushers, dressed in harlequin black and white, took us on an Eyes Wide Shut meander across the road to Rymill Park to an outdoor bar for more waiting. Then we proceeded to the large outdoor stage with a high rig for what I imagined would be extensive aerial display.

The music features well-regarded UK duo, Mr Bruce and DJ Chuck, aka The Correspondents. *Fear and Delight* is a single from their first album *Puppet Loosely Strung* and their breezy electro swing beat is most appealing. Unfortunately, despite Mr Bruce’s valiant vocal efforts, the rest of the show is a ragged mix of desultory acrobatics and self-conscious interpretive dance.

The main problem seems to be that, unlike their comrades over in the cramped , urgent confines of the Spiegeltent , the performers in *Fear and Delight* are left to flounder on a vast stage (which only enhances the meagre quality of the stage movement) under a huge night sky which diminishes the sound and tempts the performers to play larger than plausibility and our forbearance will allow.

Fear and Delight in its present form is a miscalculation. It is not as intriguing and delightful as it needs to be, and thinks it is. The sooner it gets indoors the better. Mr Bruce’s delicate whimsies don’t belong on a parade ground. In hindsight, perhaps the hanged man at the beginning of the show is a portent. Not even a curated cocktail is going to help, I regret to report.

The new enlarged program at the Royal Croquet Club in Victoria Square is proving extremely popular. Performing at the Ukiyo is the fabulously provocative political burlesque show *Hot Brown Honey*, girl brainchild of Samoan Australian Lisa Fa’alafi from Polytoxic Dance Theatre and DJ and musical director Kim “Busty Beats” Bowers, a South African born black woman also now living in Australia.

Hot Brown Honey takes racial and gender stereotypes and gives them a damn good shake. Introduced by DJ Busty Beats at the turntable, the Honeys are fun and fabulously defiant. As Busty delivers the Brook Candy hip hop tune *Don’t Touch My Hair Hoe*, three of the sistas toss their long hair in unison. From PNG Heru Pinkasova sings an aria from *Carmen* while Koori woman Juanita Duncan, as Decolonised Woman removes her Australian flag face gag, recovering her Aboriginality to the tune of *I Still Call Australia Home*.

Lisa Fa’alafi in Carmen Miranda headgear sings Belafonte’s *Coconut Woman* and also brilliantly satirises a patronising newsreel view of a “Polynesian native” weaving. Indonesian born Crystal Stacey, with hula hoops and on the stirrup swing, brings circus into the ring as well as sending up bogan girls behaving badly in Bali.

Booty twerking, voodoo, Adidas leisure suit striptease, and then beatboxing from Hope Haami aka Hope One – everything is thrown into this joyful, assertive mix. A highlight is when the women throw down their brooms and shed their hotel chambermaid aprons and uniforms, pick up their cleavers and sing India Arie’s *Brown Skin. Hot Brown Honey* is about breaking the shackles and no mistake.

Also at the Croquet Club, is the mesmerising *Smashed*, from Gandini Juggling, nine performers led by Sean Gandini and Kati Anneli Yla-Hokkala who with the aid of eighty apples and four sets of crockery present an hour of brilliant technique and thoughtful mayhem.

Inspired by the work of innovative choreographer Pina Bausch, *Smashed* opens with the performers parading to the crooning refrain of Little Jack Little’s *I’ve Always Wanted to Dance in Berlin.* In its slightly mocking urbanity it effortlessly evokes Bausch, except that all the while the performers are flawlessly juggling apples. Why apples ? Gandini said he had forbidden fruit in mind, but also Isaac Newton (gravity- the nemesis of jugglers perhaps ?) also featured.

Seated in a row on bentwood chairs, the men, dressed in lounge suits or cardigans and ties, and the women, in formal dress, continuously juggle four apples while various Bausch themes – reminiscent of works like *Café Muller* and *Kontakthof* – begin to appear. The metaphor of juggling – our social anxieties, our self esteem, the unwelcome attention of men to women, our composure when others deliberately undermine our work – operates with almost subliminal ease. *Smashed* brilliantly represents those tipping points, when our applecart, or someone else’s, is boorishly and cruelly overturned.

The music – songs such as *I Like Bananas, Don’t Say No It’s the End of the World*, Brenda Lee’s *I’m Sorry*, Louis Armstrong singing *Under the Shade of the Old Apple Tree* - cleverly underscores the dramatic (and physical) tension of the work. The tea ceremony, introduced in Tourettesian manner by the Jacques Tati-like Malte Steinmetz, is a lengthy turning point in the work. Accompanied by an extended Bach piano transcription it powerfully depicts the disintegration of fragile social codes. *Smashed* is an inspired work, intelligent, virtuosic - and Pina to the core.

Daily Review February 22, 2015,

The World in a Long Weekend: Pre-viewing WOMADelaide 2015

Published: 2015-02-27 *WOMADelaide*

Murray Bramwell

In just seven days time, on March 6, for four days and nights, WOMADelaide 2015 will fill Botanic Park with roving artists, Planet Talk speakers, KidZone artists and, of course, musicians : 58 bands from more than 30 countries. Founded 23 years ago, and an annual event since 2008, WOMAD has long been a major event in March.

Staged in the second weekend of the Adelaide Festival and flanked by the Clipsal 500 and the Adelaide Fringe, it offers all things to its diverse and staunchly recidivist audience. To some, it means high energy big ensemble acts on the Internode Centre Stage, and for others, fine-grained acoustic performances under the Moreton Bay fig trees, cutting edge late night DJs at Speakers' Corner, or lying under the stars watching musicians at the Zoo stage.

The key to WOMADelaide's durability as a major event, apart from the originality and range of its program, is that, in the driest city in the driest state, Botanic Park is a green haven, its numerous shade trees and spacious grounds offering passenger comfort unheard of in most outdoor festivals and certainly hard to find elsewhere in Adelaide in March.

This year's fixture has the usual proportion of unfamiliar names. No rounding up the usual suspects at WOMAD, although there also famous headliners on the marquee as well. From its earliest years, WOMAD has gathered a rich array of ethnic, community-based musicians, as well as high profile performers from Africa, Asia and Europe, mostly unknown to Anglophone audiences here and elsewhere.

The notion of World Music has often been contested, and for compelling reasons sometimes. But it is also true that events such as WOMAD have introduced sounds and styles, politics and perspectives, which have enriched the understanding of all participants – musicians *and* audiences.

Over the years we have seen how WOMAD acts have incorporated new trends and music forms as more hybrids proliferate – hip-hop and other urban genres now augment reggae influences, electronica mixes with Afrobeat and Cuban, gypsy and klezmer, swing and funk. Fanfare Ciocarlia, a 24 piece Romanian brass band is like a gypsy roller derby, Jambinai from South Korea use traditional folk instruments – fiddles, zither and oboe - in league with blistering electronics to mesmerising effect.

Canzioniere Grecanico Salentino from Southern Italy feature pizzica violin, melodic guitars, bouzouki and bagpipes to create spirited dance numbers contrasted by emotive ballads . Their CD, *Pizzica Indiaviolata* showcases their vibrant vocals and musicality. Playing at the Zoo on Saturday night they promise to be a highlight.

African bands have been a major component of the WOMAD program and this year there are some intriguing sounds. The Malawi Mouse Boys play African versions of gospel music, accompanied by ukeleles, guitars, spoons and tin can percussion . Their sweet vocal harmonies, whistling, and lilting rhythms are impossible to resist. In contrast, from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Jupiter and Okwess deliver a thunderous sound and a strong political message. Bandleader Jupiter Bokondji and his band have recharged afrobeat with new inflections. Their album *International* is full of sonic surprises. Their live show should be a knockout.

I am also looking out for Bombino, the Tuareg guitarist Omara Bombino Moctar, from Niger, whose rock and roll desert blues have now taken him to Nashville, Tennessee where his terrific 2013 album, *Nomad* was recorded.

Malian virtuoso Toumani Diabate is no stranger to WOMAD. His previous appearances, which include his masterful performance of *The Mande Variations,* will be etched in the minds of those who saw him. This time he performs with his eldest son Sidiki, also an exponent of the kora, a 21 string West African harp. Not only a peerless musician, Toumani Diabate is also an outstanding explainer of his music.

Appearing on Sunday night at the Internode Centre Stage is Youssou N'Dour, a WOMAD legend for his extraordinary performance back in 1992, the first year of the event. Scheduled to play in 2012, he was a late cancellation because he was preparing to contest the presidential election in Senegal. Such is his stature in his country and it is an indication of the profound influence of his music. From his 1990 album, *Set*, to his recent reggae tribute, *Dakar- Kingston* (with tracks such as *Marley* and *Medina*) Youssou N'Dour is still a towering presence. His performance will be an emotional return for the faithful and a revelation for new audiences. His Saturday afternoon Artists in Conversation session with another musician turned politician, Peter Garrett, should also be fascinating.

WOMAD has had its share of American roots music from Mavis Staples to last year's favourite, Pokey Lafarge. This time it is blues harmonica legend, Charlie Musselwhite. Now 71, his career began in the late 1960s alongside other Chicago based white musicians such as the late Paul Butterfield and Mike Bloomfield. Musselwhite's 2012 CD *Juke Joint Chapel*, finds him in top form. His most recent release, *Get Up!* a collaboration with Ben Harper, won the Best Blues Grammy in 2014.

And for hoe-down Bluegrass dance music, Gordie MacKeeman and his Rhythm Boys, from the land we now call Canadia, play everything from Laurence Welk's *Champagne Polka* and *Ragtime Cowboy Joe* to *Wildwood Flower*. Their 2013 album *Pickin-n-Clickin* is a non-stop barnstormer.

Among the Australian contingent is C.W. Stoneking, now a regular American blues exponent on the international circuit. His careful replication of old style singing and presentation is similar to the retro-style of Pokey Lafarge. This time C.W. puts aside his National duolian guitar and tenor banjo and takes up his Fender Jazzmaster for *Gon' Boogaloo,* featuring his compositions - *The Zombie*, *The Thing I Done* and *I'm a Jungle Man.*

Also featuring are Aboriginal performers, the Tjintu Desert Band, Emma Donovan and the PutBacks and from far North Queensland, Kamerunga. Luke Peacock and The Painted Ladies will perform their version of *The Loner*, an Australian black protest album written and recorded by singer-songwriter, Vic Simms, in Bathurst Gaol in 1973.

Women musicians are a major part of the WOMAD program and this year the range is exceptional. Iranian singer Tara Tiba (now resident in Perth) blends Persian classical song with jazz stylings – her CD, *A Persian Dream,* is well worth checking out. Bolivian singer Luzmila Carpio performs in the ancient Quechua dialect , Hindustani vocalist Meeta Pandit is a classical diva with a voice spanning 3 octaves, Flavia Coelho brings new strands to Brazilian bossa nova and samba, and pianist Margaret Leng Tan charts new territory in contemporary composition. .

Folk-singing legend, Buffy St Marie, has been a Native American cultural leader and inspiration since the 1960s and this continues through to her recent work, *Running for the Drum*. I also look forward to hearing her sing *Universal Soldier*, a powerful mid-60s anti-war protest anthem more salient now than it ever was. At the Moreton Bay stage, Australian singer Emma Swift teams up with British cult musician Robyn Hitchcock, and from Adelaide, Julia Henning will perform, once only, on Sunday late afternoon from her excellent new album, *Fledgling*.

Swedish duo First Aid Kit first played WOMAD in 2012 and delighted audiences with repertoire from *The Lion's Roar*. This time they will showcase their new release, *Stay Gold*. Enjoying much attention currently is Sharon Van Etten whose album *Are We There* ranked highly among the best releases of last year. Haunting, tuneful songs such as *Afraid of Nothing* and *Taking Chances* underscored with punchy rhythms distinguish themselves from the pack. She only plays once – on Friday night.

A much anticipated appearance is Neneh Cherry (with Rocketnumbernine+) featuring her project Blank Canvas, her first release in 17 years. Featuring her agile vocals combined with avant-electronic effects Neneh Cherry's sets will not disappoint. And, another highlight, is final night headliner Sinead O'Connor – for 30 years an exceptional talent, a controversialist and a creative force – who has found a new audience with recent successes such as *Nothing Compares to U*. Nothing compares to Sinead O'Connor.

Other headliners not yet mentioned are the prodigiously talented, Rufus Wainwright (son of Loudon III and Kate McGarrigle, brother of Martha) whose songs range from tear-stained confessional to jaunty ragtime, Judy Garland homage, operatic aria and the theme to the movie, *Grey Gardens*. His recent "best of"collection*, Vibrate,* captures some of this spectrum. It will be great to see him perform in the WOMAD setting. Again, once only, on Friday night.

On Saturday night the Orquesta Buena Vista Social Club – featuring singer Omara Portuondo with musicians Guajiro Mirabal, Jesus "Aguaje" Ramos and Barbarito Torres – perform what is likely to be among the last of their international shows. The Social Club closed in the 1940s. Now, after 16 years back on the road, these elderly veterans of Cuban music are finally calling it a day.

This year's is a massive program and full of discoveries. For devotees (and newcomers) to electronica the late night sets by Invisible Cities and Paul D.Miller, aka DJ Spooky, are a must. Also on my list of absolutely essential inclusions are Boston band, Lake Street Dive and their uber-catchy *Bad Self Portraits*, Irish traditional re-imaginers, The Gloaming (whose lineup includes fiddle player Martin Hayes, former Afro Celt Sound System singer Iarla O Lionaird, and pianist Thomas Bartlett) and founder Go-Between, Robert Forster, performing under the Moreton Bays with Jherek Bischoff and Adelaide's Zephyr Quartet. *Smashed*, the Pina Bausch inspired physical theatre gem from Gandini Juggling, plays twice on the Plaza on Saturday – do yourself a favour.

And, finally, the jewel in this year's crown, the Abdullah Ibrahim Quartet. Their latest CD, *Mukashi (Once upon a Time)* is sublime – and if Ibrahim also plays a solo set, as he is doing in the Festival program, it will be heaven on a stick.

WOMADelaide runs from March 6 – 9.

Daily Review, February 27, 2015.

War and Cyber-love

Published: 2015-03-05 *Adelaide Festival*

Nufonia Must Fall by Kid Koala Directed and designed by K.K.Barrett Dunstan Playhouse, Adelaide Festival Centre. March 4. Tickets: $ 30 - $ 59 Bookings : adelaidefestival.com.au BASS 131246. Until March 7. Duration 1 hr.

SmallWaR Written and performed by Valentijn Dhaenens Produced and presented by SKa-GeN Space Theatre, Adelaide Festival Centre. March 4.

Not many performances begin with a bingo call, but Canadian Eric San, aka Kid Koala, really likes to mix things around. Not only is he an impressively credentialed scratch DJ, he has also published two graphic novels, including the cryptically titled *Nufonia Must Fall*, now a stage work complete with live action puppets and a string quartet.

We all receive a bingo card and a pencil and the first to complete a line of objects wins a prize – no guesses: a graphic novel. Kid Koala then affably introduces the show and he and the Afiara Quartet begin the overture. Onstage, a crew of puppeteers, technicians, and the director of photography, A.J.Korkidakis, work across three desks, each set up with miniature décor and puppets, ready to be projected by live feed to the large screen behind them.

Filmed in a milky monochrome (the only moments of colour are a tomato being sliced) we follow the exploits of a robot who, rather than having Intel inside, has a terabyte of love for a young woman he meets in an elevator. Tribulations are many; the robot is superseded by a brash new model with six arms, and his attempts to re-skill are thwarted. In a series of charmingly cartoonish episodes, he woos his beloved. He even writes a song, standing in the rain to serenade her. Kid Koala's melodic score evokes the bittersweet melancholy of silent-era films, the set by Benjamin Gerlis and puppet designs (by Clea Minaker, Patrick Martel, Felix Boisvert and Karina Bleau) are captivating, and the director, Spike Jonze collaborator, K.K.Barrett, ensures a fluent blend of music and narrative. *Nufonia Must Fall* is an endearing tale of undaunted cyber-love, and its technical intricacy is a delight to watch.

SmallWaR, on the other hand, is not intended to be fun at all. In a gripping follow-up to *BigMouth* in last year's festival, Belgian actor, Valentijn Dhaenens has gathered historical verbatim statements from those most affected by the misery of warfare. *BigMouth* focused on the oratory of leaders, often exhorting their people to battle. *SmallWaR* recounts what that combat was actually like. Often using letters to loved ones, it reveals the inner thoughts of soldiers, many of them mortally wounded, and the nurses who cared for them in extremis.

Documents from World War I through to the Falklands, Rwanda, Iraq and Afghanistan give authentic voice to physical horrors far removed from the abstractions of liberty and valour. The excellent video, set and sound design by Jeroen Wuyts enables Dhaenens to perform with multiple images and music in a seamless way. *SmallWaR* is a memorable work admirably presented, and a timely reminder of what those words "supreme sacrifice" really mean.

Murray Bramwell

"War and Cyber-love" The Australian, March 6, 2015, P.14

Adelaide Festival 2015

Published: 2015-03-09 *Adelaide Festival · Music*

Daily Review Murray Bramwell

Roses and Bryars

Gavin Bryars Ensemble March 3. Elder Hall

Jesus Blood Never Failed Me Yet and selected orchestral works March 5. Adelaide Town Hall

One of the highlights of this year's Adelaide Festival has been composer-in- residence Gavin Bryars. Yorkshire-born, Bryars has been prominent in minimalist music since the late 1960s, with works such as *The Sinking of the Titanic* (1969) and *Jesus Blood Never Failed Me Yet* in 1972. Both were first released on Brian Eno's Obscure Records and Bryars and Eno were also founder members of the celebrated experimental orchestra, Portsmouth Sinfonia.

For his recital, at Elder Hall, Bryars performed with his Ensemble – long standing friends and associates, such as cellist Nick Cooper and electric guitarist James Woodrow, who join Bryars on double bass for the opening work, the haunting first section of *Tre Laude Dolce*, setting the mood for a sublime program of contemplative music.

The trio is joined by soprano Peyee Chen and tenor John Potter for a set of *laudas*, based on short vernacular religious songs first heard in Italy in the 13th century. Opening with *Lauda 4, Oi me lasso,* the singers are outstanding, Bryars guiding the progress of his compositions with unfussy precision.

Bryars introduces his works with an easy informality. *Flowers of Friendship*, a commission from a Harvard law professor dedicated to his wife, he describes as being an odd assignment. Firstly, the wife hated vocal music and further, while dedicated to each other, she and her husband lived in separate residences. The work, an instrumental duet for tremolo electric guitar and bowed bass, is a beautifully sustained tribute - even if Bryars refers somewhat ironically to the Gertrude Stein poem, *Before the flowers of friendship faded friendship faded.*

There is pleasing variation in the two hour program. Closing the first half with a series of items from the recent (2012) *The Morrison Songbook*, after interval, Bryars moves to the piano to perform *Lauda con sordino*, an instrumental performed with Morgan Goff on viola and the ubiquitous Woodrow on gently cranked electric guitar. The series *Irish Madrigals* is the centrepiece of the second half – nine works based on Petrarch's sonnets to Laura using craggy, idiosyncratic prose translations by the Irish playwright J.M. Synge which Bryars came across accidentally when researching the project. Concluding with the dulcet *Lauda 28 Amor Dolce Senza Pare*, the Gavin Bryars Ensemble leaves the audience in something close to a swoon.

Two nights later at the Town Hall, Bryars collaborated with the Adelaide Symphony for a program which opened with the shimmering *Lento* composed by Howard Kempton and *If Bach had been a beekeeper*, a playfully intricate work by Arvo Part, like Kempton, a personal friend of Bryars.

The Porazzi Fragment, a work for strings by Bryars, incorporates a 13 bar composition by Richard Wagner which he began at the time of *Tristan and Isolde* and finished just after the completion of *Parsifal* when he was staying at a palace in the Piazza dei Porazzi in Palermo. Cosima, Wagner's widow, describes hearing him play this musical morsel on his piano the night before he died. Bryars's composition envelopes the fragment with a Wagnerian richness which pays homage to the composer but is never imitative.

The centrepiece of the night is *Jesus Blood Never Failed Me Yet*, an early work, revived, extended and re-recorded with Tom Waits in 1993. The unaccompanied refrain which provides the title comes from an audio tape a friend of Bryars had made for a documentary film about vagrants living rough in central London in the late 1960s. In his introduction to the performance, Bryars describes the tramp who sings the hymn as "a sober, frail old man". He continues : "I hear dignity, humanity, optimism and simple faith. There is a smile in the voice."

It is an exceptional skerrick of song which can sustain nearly sixty minutes of music, constantly repeated until it becomes an almost maddening refrain. Bryars himself says in the process of recording the work he must have heard the voice loop more than 14,000 times.

In the Town Hall, under Bryars' baton the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra sustain the repetitions and variations, the wax and wanings, with admirable delicacy and discipline. Opening with the unaccompanied voice gradually gaining volume, various sections of the orchestra add layers of melody without ever diminishing the centrality of the vocal theme – "Jesus' blood never failed me yet / never failed me yet/ Jesus' blood never failed me yet/ it's one thing I know/ for he loves me so."

It is a well-known work, but hearing it performed live has a different kind of intensity. It is to move from the pleasure of its serenade, to excruciation with what seem like never-ending repetitions. Then, as the music recedes into the infinity it seems to come from, we feel the sort of resolution that might come from extended meditation. Perhaps this is the musical equivalent of Samuel Beckett.

Bryars' Adelaide Festival residency - which also included his chamber opera, *Marilyn Forever* and another Ensemble recital featuring The Song Company and guest Gavin Friday - has been a memorable experience. In 2014, festival director David Sefton invited the mercurial, hyper-manic, ear-popping John Zorn. This time, we have enjoyed the genial presence of Gavin Bryars. And, one thing I know - his accessible, warmly affirmative and splendidly crafted compositions never failed us all week.

Published online, Daily Review, March 9, 2015.

Marriages made in burlesque

Published: 2015-03-12 *Adelaide Festival*

Adelaide Festival Theatre

Beauty and the Beast One of Us/Improbable Dunstan Playhouse, Adelaide Festival Centre. March 10. Tickets: $ 30 - $ 59 Bookings: adelaidefestival.com.au, BASS 131 246. Duration : 1 hr 15 mins. R 18+. Until March 15.

The Cardinals Devised by Alia Alzougbi, Gerard Bell, Graeme Rose, Craig Stephens Stan's Cafe. Flinders Street Baptist Church, 65 Flinders Street March 11. Tickets: $ 30 - $ 49 Bookings: adelaidefestival.com.au, BASS 131 246. Duration : 1 hr 40 mins. Until March 14.

Some marriages are made in heaven; others in Coney Island. When burlesque queen, Julie Atlas Muz met disabled performer Mat Fraser in New York, it was the beginning of many things, including this delightfully intriguing version of *Beauty and the Beast*.

They introduce themselves – Julie is a former Miss Exotic World from Detroit, and Mat, from the UK, affected by thalidomide, was born with short arms –"two perfectly deformed limbs".

Expertly directed by Phelim McDermott, this show is a vibrant mix of sexual candour, theatrical wit, and fun – and, although it is R-rated for its plentiful nudity, there is a playful innocence to its jubilant burlesque.

Ably assisted by Jess Mabel Jones and Jonny Dixon as puppeteers, magic lantern projectionists and frolicking orgy extras, the saga of Julie-meets-Mat intersperses their re-telling of the archetypal 18th century story of Beauty, who, to save the life of her father, devotes herself to the regal Beast, first in duty and then in love.

Lit in scarlet washes by Colin Grenfell, Philip Eddolls' splendidly decorated set, creates a luscious spectacle - sumptuous fabrics with tendrils of roses, matched by Kevin Pollard's stylishly droll costumes. *Beauty and the Beast* is cleverly poised between bawdy comedy and courtly romance.

The Cardinals, from Birmingham company, Stan's Cafe, is a sometimes uneasy mix of styles. Dressed in red soutanes, three cardinals, along with their stage manager, a young Moslem woman dressed in a hijab, perform in a puppet show of Bible stories. They are unskilled in their stagecraft and there is much hilarity as they fumble props, miss their cues, and generally get in each other's way.

Quite why lofty cardinals are touring a tent show isn't clear. This is more Father Ted and Dougal territory. Nor do we know how seriously to take the speedy Biblical narrative – all without dialogue - from Genesis to the Gospels, followed then by a hurriedly delivered history of fraught religious geopolitics from the Crusades to the creation of Israel. It also comments strongly on present day religious enmities.

Beyond the knockabout comedy and the Monty Python cross-dressing in head shawls and wigs, the production aspires to the naïve lyricism of folk performances like the Medieval Mystery plays. So sections such as the Annunciation and the Passion, for instance, could claim more dramatic gravity than they do.

The lighting, design and costumes have a technicolor glory to them, and the use of music - classical, religious and 80s dance beats – also enhances the production. This is skilful, painstaking, often touching theatre, however, director James Yarker has not sufficiently varied the comedy and the frenetic tempo of the narrative. The first night crowd loved them, but these hyperactive Cardinals don't have to work this hard to please us.

Murray Bramwell

"Marriages made in burlesque" The Australian, March 13, p.16.

Adelaide Festival 2015

Published: 2015-03-16 *Adelaide Festival*

Daily Review March 16 Adelaide Festival 2015

Adelaide Festival(s)

Murray Bramwell

It is only 16 days into the month and already Adelaide's "Mad March" is over. Admittedly, the Fringe began on February 13, but the intensity and simultaneity of the various major events – Fringe, Clipsal 500, Adelaide Cup and, of course, the original March event, the Adelaide Festival – in just a fortnight, is both exhilarating and, perhaps, problematic.

Just as it has in Edinburgh, home to the first (and most prestigious) of the post-war arts gatherings - and model for the Adelaide event, the Festival itself has been monstered by its own Fringe. The growth of the Adelaide Fringe has been extraordinary.

More than 1,050 events were registered for this year's Fringe and the final weekend media releases declare ticket sales estimated at 536,000, a 20% increase on last year's record attendance. Guesstimates of attendances exceeding 2 million may be contested, but no-one in the vicinity of the Royal Croquet Club at Victoria Square or the East End of Rundle Street near the Garden of Unearthly Delights and Gluttony can doubt that the crowds were huge and the buzz was upbeat, inclusive and very good-natured.

For David Sefton, artistic director of the Adelaide Festival for a third year in 2015, with one more to go next year, the challenges - of re-positioning an event which began in a very different world in 1960 – are considerable. A succession of directors has faced this prospect and each has strengthened the festival's standing. Rob Brookman, Christopher Hunt, Barrie Kosky, Robyn Archer, Stephen Page, Brett Sheehy, Paul Grabowsky, even the eccentric Peter Sellars - all added to, and shaped, the expectations of audiences over the past twenty years. But, in that period, many of Adelaide's old rivals in other Australian cities got more serious about their festivals, and newcomers emerged to make the calendar even more crowded.

It is under Sefton's command that the Adelaide Festival has become an annual fixture and, while this was regarded as inevitable, it has meant that the program can no longer resemble the juggernaut that the biennial version became - especially under Archer and Sheehy. Doing more with less in half the time is a big ask – but one that Sefton has taken up with vigour and flair.

Sefton arrived with a track record of programming for US campus audiences and an enthusiasm for new music in particular. He also had some very interesting contacts on his speed-dial. In the first year he brought the Kronos Quartet, Laurie Anderson (first seen at the Adelaide Festival in 1986) and the somewhat raggle-taggle Brassland musicians from Brooklyn. Last year, he featured a terrific four night program showcasing the diverse genius of American composer, John Zorn and a mob of his long-time collaborators.

The 2015 music program also has had some memorable highlights. Resident composer Gavin Bryars presented his chamber opera *Marilyn Forever*, along with three nights of compositions ranging from settings of Petrarch, Shakespeare, Italian laudas, and, with excellent assistance from the Adelaide Symphony, his early classic *Jesus' Blood Never Failed Me Yet.* Bryars, with his likeable Yorkshire directness and the memorably contemplative performances from his ensemble, was a highpoint.

Another project, the result of Sefton's web of music connections, was the world premiere of Eric Mingus's jazz version of Pete Townshend's rock opera, *Tommy*. Mingus, son of jazz bass legend Charles Mingus, had been looking to stage this event for some time and Sefton's festival provided the opportunity. Featuring a mix of US and Australian musicians, the show arranged and directed by Mingus with MD, Giancarlo Vulcano included Yael Stone as Tommy, Camille O'Sullivan and Robert Forster as his parents, and the lugubrious Gavin Friday as the Acid Queen.

Produced by Hal Willner, prolific creator of shows such as the Leonard Cohen tribute, *Came So Far For Beauty* and *Rogues Gallery*, a concert of sea shanties and pirate ballads, *Tommy* came together after less than ten days rehearsal. The result was a lively pinball jackpot. Mingus was thrilled to see his idea made real, and David Sefton tells me there is now a bidding war for the show in New York.

Also in the music offerings this year were guitar maestro Richard Thompson, the sublime Abdullah Ibrahim performing solo improvised piano, and *Blow the Bloody Doors Off*, a tribute to 1960s UK film scores including *Alfie, Get Carter* and *The Italian Job*.

There was also plenty for a younger demographic and those with a more esoteric taste for post-Rock electronica. Mogwai, 65daysofstatic and the reformed post-punk outfit The Pop Group also played during the festival. And Unsound Adelaide returned for the third time, offering a program of three nights of noise, drone, trance, jungle and murky dub.

On the Friday night at the Freemasons' Hall, we heard the hazy sounds of Forest Swords, the primordial bass of The Bug and, the highlight, *Double Vision*, a blitzkrieg of 3D lasers and digital animations from Robin Fox, accompanied by exhilarating electronic programming from Atom TM. When the credits came up, acknowledging the Adelaide Festival commission, the crowd cheered – a positive indication that the festival is responding well to a new, and appreciative, constituency.

Theatre in 2015 has been more low-key. Perhaps that is inevitable after last year's magnificent composite of Shakespearean drama, Ivo Van Hove's *Roman Histories* from Dutch company Toneelgroep Amsterdam, propelled the festival from the very first weekend.

State Theatre's *Beckett Triptych*, a set of three short plays from Samuel Beckett, including the rarely performed *Eh Joe*, proved to be an early highlight with outstanding performances from Paul Blackwell, Pamela Rabe, and Peter Carroll, ably directed by Corey McMahon, Geordie Brookman and Nescha Jelk. They were the only Adelaide company represented this year, so it is to be hoped that 2016 will see fuller representation and (do I hear?) the premiere of a high profile commission.

A number of works were monologues. *SmallWaR*, a collage of first hand reports and letters documenting conditions at the front and in field hospitals during World War I, was expertly performed by Belgian actor Valentijn Dhaenens. Including smartly integrated video and musical elements, *SmallWaR* was both powerful and theatrically inventive.

Olwen Fouere, with *riverrun,* delivered a virtuosic staging of a section of James Joyce's cryptic novel, *Finnegan's Wake*. It was a remarkable performance, not only in rendering a fiendishly difficult text, but in its vocal range, physicality and use of silence. At times, Fouere even made hauling motions like she was trawling a huge net of words from the Liffey. And a gnarly, barnacled cluster of multi-lingual puns, portmanteaus and neologisms they were. This, regrettably, is a problem for the production because, even to Joyce scholars, *Finnegan's Wake* is an under-rewarding puzzle.

This is not mellifluous jabberwocky, it is like literary coral. Joyce himself said he was to be studied and not read, and the *Wake* was his 17 year descent into calculated obscurity . When performed we can only get a tiny amount of the gist and when Olwen Fouere deliberately dispensed with the musicality of the Anna Livia Plurabelle speech (the one section that Joyce himself thought was accessible enough for him to record) she was making a tough call. Ultimately, *riverrun* flowed over and past us, but not very rewardingly through us.

Return Journey, Bob Freedom's recital of Welsh writer, Dylan Thomas's poetry and melodious prose was like aural fruit cake. Looking fully the part, Freedom, with curly hair and spotted bow tie, captured the cadence and the alliterative comedy of Thomas's broadcasts about his childhood in Swansea. The actor was having voice problems late in the season, but by lowering the volume and the gusto a little, we were reminded all the more of the subtlety and complexity of Thomas's remarkable gift.

As the title suggests*, La Merda (The Shit*) is a confronting work. Performed naked by Silvia Gallerano, it is a narrative turned diatribe which gnaws at multiple obsessions – including the death by suicide of her father and a pathological loathing of her body, especially her thighs. The text by Cristian Ceresoli, was performed in a range of voices, both literal and narrative, culminating in Artaudian screams of anguish, anger and despair. The impact, because of the dexterity of Gallerano's performance and the cogency, wit, even humour, of this thought-provoking cultural critique, was both affecting and enduring.

Mention must be made of *Black Diggers,* a play about Aboriginal volunteers before, during and after the First World War, written by Tom Wright and directed Wesley Enoch for Queensland Theatre Company and Sydney Festival. As one of very few Australian works in the Festival, it was a timely reminder of Indigenous valour against on-going discrimination, powerfully performed by an ensemble including Luke Carroll, Trevor Jamieson and George Bostock.

Other theatre works this festival included popular DJ, Kid Koala's staging of his graphic novel, *Nufonia Must Fall*, charmingly performed with miniature puppetry in a live feed video with music and FX by the Kid; *The Cardinals* from Stan's Cafe, a comically thoughtful puppet booth performance of Bible stories by four actors (including one representing a young Moslem woman), and *Beauty and the Beast* the enthusiastically erotic, strangely innocent re-telling of the French fable by burlesque queen Julie Atlas Muz and thalidomide-affected UK actor, Mat Fraser.

Over three years, Sefton's dance program has receded – from 5 events in 2013, including Sylvie Guillem and Louise Lecavalier, to Batsheva Dance Company plus 2 others last year, to one this year. Two, if you include *Azimut*, the intriguing, beautifully lit, acrobatic physical theatre/circus from Compagnie 111, directed by Aurelian Bory and performed by Moroccan company Groupe Acrobatique de Tanger.

However, when that one company is the American Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet, it is an occasion which will be long remembered. Performing *Mixed Rep* featuring choreography by Jiri Kylian, Crystal Pite and Hofesh Schecter, and *Orbo Novo,* created by Belgian maestro, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, the Cedar Lake dancers were simply dazzling. Based on *My Stroke of Insight*, the memoir by neuroanatomist , Jill Bolte Taylor about her experience having a stroke, *Orbo Novo* describes, with text and movement, the crisis, fascination, and the transcendental aspects of her discovery, temporarily, of life without the dominating left brain, and in the exhilarating freedom of the right. Performed by the full ensemble of 15, the dancers, in threes, recite sections of Taylor's book , then Cherkaoui's splendid choreography unfurls like a revelation of ...Orbo Novo, a New World.

Against a large, flexible lattice wooden framework, the dancers perform in pairs, trios, and in extraordinarily fluid, full stage group choreography. They are not prosaically illustrating synapses or rogue brain cells, although there are sections indicating the physical impairment and loss of control Taylor felt. Instead, the work seeks to illuminate the unexpected wonder she experienced as a scientist inside the laboratory of her own body. *Orbo Novo* not only enters into a new world of experience, it reveals further and unexpected possibilities in the vocabulary of contemporary movement.

In his festivals David Sefton has always emphasised broad appeal events, often free of charge, for general audiences. The Neil Finn and Paul Kelly concert in Elder Park in 2013 and Kid Creole last year are good examples. This time, the focus has been on the visual arts with a retrospective of video artist, Bill Viola and the Blinc video projections and installations on North Terrace and in Elder Park along the Torrens.

We have seen the facades of the Parliament House precinct and the roof of the Festival Centre used as canvases for light shows before, but this year featured new-generation technology including lasers as well as, surely, the popular favourite, a life sized 3D pachyderm, *Elephantastic* ! The Blinc program, spread over 11 locations, seemed disappointingly scattered and fragmented. Perhaps the already gaudy lighting of the Adelaide Oval complex and along the footbridge diminished the effect and intensity of the installations.

The Bill Viola exhibits, certainly those at the Art Gallery, were more of historic interest, their innovations now somewhat overtaken, and their technical calibre also superseded by subsequent large screen video technology.

There was no doubting, however, the audience enthusiasm for the final night event at the Entertainment Centre, featuring the Adelaide Symphony performing *Danny Elfman's Music from the Films of Tim Burton*. The large crowd gloried in Elfman's themes from *Pee Wee's Big Adventure, Beetlejuice, Mars Attacks* and *Sleepy Hollow*, through the *Batman* films to *Edward Scissorhands* and *Alice in Wonderland*.

Accompanied by projections of short extracts from the films and Tim Burton's own sublime production design illustrations, the sight and sound combination had the legion of Burton and Elfman fans in ecstacy. The crowd highlight was Elfman reprising songs from the grinchy classic *Tim Burton's Nightmare Before Christmas*. Under the baton of Hollywood conductor, John Mauceri, the orchestra and choir (with a rapturously popular solo from 9 year old Charlie Wells) performed well and enjoyed their task.

Now, as the Festival concludes, the media communiqués proclaim the largest attendances in 5 years, with estimates of more than 560,000. The 42 event program included 22 Australian premieres, 26 exclusive to Adelaide. Add in Writers Week and 3 days and 4 nights of Womadelaide and the Festival conglomeration is impressive.

David Sefton's 2015 event provided many pleasures and enduring highlights. For me, Cedar Lake's *Orbo Novo*, Gavin Bryars, *Small WaR* and *Beauty and the Beast* joined the list of long-standing Festival favourites. We now look forward to what the enterprising Sefton is hatching for next year's final hurrah.

Daily Review, March 16, 2015.

Excellent new theatre works worth seeking out in carnival of culture

Published: 2016-02-17 *Adelaide Fringe · Theatre*

Adelaide Fringe

Echoes by Henry Naylor The Arch, Holden Street Theatre Company In association with Gilded Balloon, Edinburgh February 10. Until March 13.

The Last Time I Saw Richard by Cat Commander five.point.one The Bakehouse. February 16. Until Feb 23.

Red Ink by Duncan Graham Tuxedo Cat, Perske Pavillion February 16. Until Feb 23.

It is not yet “mad March” in Adelaide and already the Fringe, the gargantuan, carnivalesque doppelganger to the Festival has roared into action. For artists and producers it is a Darwinian struggle in an uncurated program of more than 1100 events. In theatre alone there are 151 listings and getting noticed in a mixed ruck of comedy, carny spectacle and hyperactive PR is difficult. Nonetheless, this year, like many previously, offers excellent new Australian work; green shoots which promise the future.

At Tuxedo Cat, Duncan Graham’s new play *Red Ink* features a woman police officer, the mother of a squealing toddler, a checkout operator and a mentally disturbed young man calling himself Stalin. Crisply directed by Shannon Mackowski, Graham’s deft script investigates a sequence of events that leads from a moment of irritation about a packet of Sao biscuits in a supermarket queue to a tragic over-reaction. Fast-paced, shrewdly observed, capably performed (Matthew Gregan is excellent as the man) *Red Ink* is a theatrical cracker.

The Last Time I Saw Richard is an absorbing new work from Melbourne playwright Cat Commander. Set in a series of hotel rooms over eleven years, it explores a quasi- erotic friendship between April, 27 and Richard, 39. They are corporate strolling players, working as mandatory training session facilitators and hanging out in each other’s hotel rooms. Richard (Charles Mayer) is a struggling actor, always auditioning – informercials, hospital TV soaps – ever optimistic for the big break in LA. April (Elizabeth Hay) is brittle, elusive, harbouring regrets and resisting intimacy.

Ably directed by Craig Behenna and engagingly performed by both actors, the play is a series of brief encounters, conversations, confessions, confrontations, and emotional intimacies which form an unexpected continuity for April even after she marries someone else. Designed by Behenna, Matt Crook and Brad Williams, using simple, brightly backlit screens, this is an assured comedy of awkward manners. Cat Commander writes lively, funny dialogue capturing the anxieties, follies and ambivalence of contemporary relationships.

Martha Lott, enterprising director at Holden Street Theatres, has again funded top-notch international productions from the most recent Edinburgh Fringe. Included is *Echoes*, written and directed by Henry Naylor and featuring excellent performances by Filipa Bracanca and Felicity Houlbrooke as Samira and Tillie, two English women from different centuries. Both from Ipswich one is a teenage jihadist encouraged by a friend to become a slave bride to ISIS in Rakka, the other is in a 19th century arranged marriage to a sadistic army officer in Afghanistan. The dual monologues make vivid, confronting and timely theatre.

“Excellent new theatre works worth seeking out in carnival of culture” The Australian , February 18, 2016, p.15.

Murray Bramwell

Four of the Best of the Adelaide Fringe ...So Far

Published: 2016-02-18 *Adelaide Fringe · Cabaret*

The Adelaide Fringe gets ever bigger and more successful. This year an estimated sixty-six thousand citizens turned out for last week's opening parade marking the beginning of the month long Fringe season. On the same day a record 10,000 tickets were sold. With more than 1100 events and 5000 artists, it is the second largest (and second oldest) Fringe after the legendary Edinburgh fixture.

The venues spread around the Adelaide CBD have all been packed. At Rundle Park, Rymill Park and adjacent precincts in Adelaide's East End, The Garden of Unearthly Delights and Gluttony have attracted punters in ever greater numbers, while The Royal Croquet Club, back for a third time, is hooping it up at Victoria Square. Here are some of their top performances.

Torte E Mort (Ukiyo, Royal Croquet Club, 8 pm until Feb 21. Four Stars.)

"I don't do Burlesque" bellows Marie Antoinette aka Anye Anastasia in the deliciously witty *Torte E Morte*. She may not do burlesque but, peeling off her gloves with her teeth and levering herself out of her 18th century French frock and corset seems suspiciously like it.

Marie-Antoinette is back from the French Revolution of 1789 to put the record straight and rehabilitate her reputation at the same time. "There are so many ways to lose your head," she croons in a blizzard of puns, accompanying herself on electric keyboard while a baleful lady-in-waiting holds the mic and musical associate (and occasional hooded executioner) Bec Matthews provides the drums, kazoos, whistles and other aural garnishes.

"I never said let them eat cake," Marie-A protests, "it'll go straight to your hips." But her comeback performance is not having too much success – her options hardly befit a celeb. She becomes a ghost, then a she-Devil in horns and kinky red satin ("there's a Sexpo in Hell") and finally a talking head singing "I Ain't Got No-body." The idea is droll guignol and the execution is terrific. *Torte E Mort* - I've been dying to say this - takes the cake.

Sam Halmarack and the Miserablites (The Parlour, Croquet Club, 7.30. Until Feb 21. Four Stars)

What happens when you're lead singer and the band doesn't turn up ? That's the problem for UK performer Sam Halmarack, guiding light for his band The Miserablites. He is left alone in his headband and zip-up satin jacket like an Echo without The Bunnymen. Fortunately he has a rehearsal DVD to show us -complete with lyrics, vocal charts, and key changes.

Drawing us closer to the stage like moths to the smoke machine, Sam recruits new members for the band. A young woman is picking out notes on an elderly Roland keyboard, another needs no encouragement to set up behind the drum kit. Sam is musical director, while his DVD shows us his rehearsal room (full of his mum's un-ironed washing) and he glosses his often deeply personal lyrics. I am not a has-been he explains because *I Never Was Been.* A particularly hectic tirade is, he reminds us, ironically entitled *This Is Romance.*

This show is a neat little parcel of deadpan wit. To the land of Norman Gunston, such sustained gormlessness is a welcome visitor. *We Will Never Give Up*, Sam Halmarack sings above our choral refrain- and he doesn't . Nor does his shrewdly fond send-up of 90's electro-pop. It has the crowd calling itself back for an encore.

The Pianist (The Panama Club, Croquet Club, 6 pm. Until Feb 28. Five Stars)

There is no more strict decorum than that of piano recital. To be serious, dignified, self possessed : these are essential elements – and in *The Pianist*, Thomas Monckton knows this well. It is unfortunate, then, that it takes him six minutes to even find his way through the curtains to come on stage. And then there is the forgotten sheet music, and the chandelier that is right in his way when he approaches the ever-elusive keyboard. And the lid that won't open, and the leg ...

With perfect timing, Monckton's gangly musician, battles with the multiple - and multiplying - adversities which beset him. This excellent, silent slapstick, is cued down to the nanosecond and brimming with visual gags. His sorties into the audience- to remonstrate with the lighting desk operator, or to find a functioning chair – are further thwarted by the fact that he requires someone from the crowd to load him, in ungainly fashion, back on to the podium.

This is splendid physical comedy. Monckton's sustained invention , his rubbery contortions, and his capacity for self-inflicted excruciations remind us of Roadrunner's Coyote. *The Pianist* is classical Looney Tunes.

Fag/Stag (Ukiyo, The Croquet Club, 6.30. Until Feb 28. (Four and a Half Stars)

Fag/Stag is about Jimmy and Corgan, old friends who have much in common. For instance, they both fell in love with, and parted company with, Tamara, who is now getting married to some bloke neither of them like. There were very different reasons for their break-ups though. Jimmy discovered that he really was gay and girls, not even Tamara, could not be for him. And Corgan, cocooned in privilege and parental hand-outs, just couldn't commit and retreated back into his laddish distractions. Now they both have to get suited up for a milestone occasion which challenges them to think about their own thirty-something lives. Slumped in front of their never-ending game of Donkey Kong, both bemoan the fact they can't move to the next level.

Fag/Stag written and performed in alternating monologues by Jeffrey Jay Fowler (Jimmy) and Chris Isaacs (Corgan) is about much more than the divide between gay and straight friends, although it is a shrewd and articulate study of Australian masculinities. It is also provides wider perspectives : on the quiet desperation behind Tinder and Grindr, on self-image anxiety, and suppressed anger and violence.

Funny, satiric, and stylishly written *Fag/Stag* is both entertaining and unsettling in its candour. Both characters reveal the kind of unhappiness and uncertainty few young men willingly admit. Never indulging in mawkishness, *Fag/Stag* is revelatory – and very prepared to take Donkey Kong to a higher level.

Daily Review, February 18, 2016

Penny Arcade – Older, Wiser, Longer – and as thoughtful as ever

Published: 2016-02-18 *Adelaide Fringe · Theatre*

Penny Arcade (Ukiyo, The Royal Croquet Club, 9.30 until March 14. Four and a Half Stars)

Penny Arcade, aka Susana Ventura, has an impeccable New York CV. She performed in Warhol/Morrisey films, she hung out as a teenager at Max's Kansas City. She was there at Stonewall and in the terrible AIDS epidemic in the 80s and 90s. Last time she visited Adelaide as part of the 1994 Adelaide Festival, she performed wearing only an American flag. She also brought a bevy of pole-dancers. The production was called *Bitch!Dyke!FagHag!Whore*! *The Penny Arcade Sex and Censorship Show.*

22 years later, the diminutive Ms Arcade is dressed in a pink frock and the show is entitled *Longing Lasts Longer*. At one point in her widely-ranging presentation she exclaims: "This is not stand-up comedy, not cabaret or performance art, it is not theatre. This is just you and me in the post-gentrification landscape. "

Her show is punctuated by bursts of rock music and subliminal samples of famous riffs. It is mostly 60s stuff : Doors, Van Morrison, Hendrix, Donovan's Season of the Witch. Although - she makes abundantly clear - there is no nostalgia for that decade of civil rights violence, assassinations and escalating warfare in Indo-China. Along with the musical interludes, Penny also pirouettes from time to time, doing little dance routines as the bass lines from *The End* and *When the Music's Over* thrum through the tannoys.

And it is her most abiding refrain that some things are really over. Not just changing, morphing, unfolding but officially cactus. As someone once said - dead, buried and cremated. History has been erased, she laments, and it is the end of culture. Calling on many sources and influences for her view, Penny names a few – Guy Debord, the French Situationist, for instance, and his views on the Society of Spectacle : when technology merged with advertising and media to create an integrated spectacle. At that point, four people headed for the door, hurriedly climbing down the bleachers to escape ...escape what ? Sociology ? Subversion ? Sustained thought ? Or a talk that is turning into a lecture – or a blaspheming sermon ?

When she roars – "Who gives a fuck about Kanye West ? !" five more (this time slim, young) people start marching out. They missed her saying : "They have hijacked our attention and they are renting it back to us." It is an invigorating feature of the event that no-one's view is comfortably, reassuringly stroked. If you like going to New York - you have been suckered by theme-park New York. The New York over-run by fake gentrification and cupcake shops. Penny hates cupcakes.

She hates the mediocrity of the crowd, she hates retro. She hates Patti Smith's *Just Kids* for God's sake. That book is supposed to be cool. She doesn't think much of hipsters, or twenty year olds who know about wine. She hates PC and the Tyranny of Fragility – students protected from text books with nasty ideas and hate language. Yikes - is Penny going to start talking up the Oregon Occupation militia guys any minute now ?

A few more walk out. I don't care if you leave, Penny says drily, I have my own problems. But they are our problems too and the now not-quite-full house is staying around to hear more. Her theme is the need for authenticity, for striving and for finding out who you are. She praises the New York of solitude and sanctuary, New York as a holy place. Holy like Allen Ginsberg meant it in his famous *Howl* - the best minds of his generation etc, when hipsters were angelheaded not lumberjack bearded.

I reviewed Penny Arcade back in 1994 and I was ungenerous. She retaliated by reading disdainfully from my review in her show. Who does this grump think he is ? I said the show went on too long, she should have quit while she was ahead. I slipped into protective irony. I said in for a Penny, out with a pounding.

Longing Lasts Longer runs a bit long also. At the 90 minute point she said it would soon be finished but it isn't. It is the urgency of her message that keeps her talking. Like the Ancient Mariner she is holding on to our sleeves, warning us about that drifting, lifeless boat we're in and the albatross around our necks. The albatross of nostalgia, "Nostalgia," she warns, "protects us from the reality we have settled for".

Penny Arcade, at nearly sixty six, is more pensive, wiser, she is now playing the long game. She understands longing – it is about desire, she says, that is not material. It is also about recognising what matters in life, which for her is - "individuality, joy and gratitude in the face of the erasure of history and loss of culture."

This show has been a rich and rambling not-theatre, not-stand-up, not performance art thing – sometimes sermon, sometimes rant, sometimes ecstatic peroration, sometimes self-help pep talk, many times funny. Whatever it is, it got inside our closely guarded brain-pans and stirred things around with just the right amount of stimulation and discomfort.

Daily Review, February 18, 2016.

King James Versions

Published: 2016-02-28 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Adelaide Festival

The James Plays by Rona Munro National Theatre of Scotland, National Theatre of Great Britain, Edinburgh International Festival. February 27. Duration 7 hours 40 minutes including intervals.

“We cannot know the character and thoughts of these dead kings and queens and long-gone Scots,” Rona Munro remarks of the succession of royals and underlings who populate her dazzling epic trilogy, *The James Plays*, “(But) we can speculate a whole series of possibilities from the few hard facts we can rely on.” And speculate she does, to splendid dramatic effect.

Set in a period, 1394 -1503, of virtually unknown Scottish history, Munro follows the reigns of three kings each entering at a different point in the wheel of history. In the first play, *James I: The Key Will Keep the Lock*, the king, after 18 years in an English prison , returns to a country controlled by hostile clans. To restore order, paradoxically, he wages bloody war on those closest to him.

James II :The Day of the Innocents, explores the progress of a boy crowned king at the age of six, perpetually surrounded by malign forces. The final play *The True Mirror*, reflects James III, a clever, careless narcissist whose neglected kingdom is saved - for a time - by his remarkable Danish-born, Queen Margaret.

The National Theatre of Scotland, consummately directed by Laurie Sansom, has created a work that is both spectacular and intimate in its effect. Bathed in Philip Gladwell’s magnificent light, Jon Bausor’s versatile single set features a granite-like stage with wooden panelling, a steep staircase to the throne (surrounded by tiered seating for the audience) and a huge sword rising from stage-left like Excalibur itself.

The music, composed by Paul Leonard-Morgan and Will Gregory, to lyrics by Munro, and performed by the ensemble, moves from winsome folk song to pop ceilidh to spine-tingling plainsong.

But it is the performances which bring Munro’s bold, sinewy narratives and earthy, expressive Scots dialogue to such vibrant life. All three kings are outstanding: Steven Miller as James I, the poet king with a steely resolve and a broken heart, Daniel Cahill (James II) literally scarred for life and locked in tragic struggle with his only friend (memorably played by Andrew Still) and Matthew Pidgeon, as the extravagant, doomed hedonist, James III.

In other roles, John Stahl is commanding as Murdac and the manipulative Livingston, Malin Crepin brings majesty to Queen Margaret, Sally Reid’s Meg is all heart, and Blythe Duff is marvellous both as the ferocious Isabella Stewart and the ever-constant Annabella.

This production has been compared to the TV binge favourites *Game of Thrones* and *House of Cards* but in the immediacy, sustained depth and sheer dramatic momentum of *The James Plays*, Rona Munro and these fine performers remind us that sitting in the theatre is where the real thrills can be found.

Murray Bramwell “King James Versions”, *The Australian*, February 29, 2016, p. 14

Navigating the New World

Published: 2016-03-01 *WOMADelaide · Music*

Murray Bramwell previews WOMADelaide 2016

It is less than ten days until WOMADelaide opens again for three days and four nights of intriguing and often exhilarating music, performed by 400 musicians from more than 30 countries. From small, but nonetheless impressive, beginnings in 1992 under the wing of Rob Brookman's Adelaide Festival, WOMADelaide, now in its 20th incarnation and an annual fixture since 2002, has become a major national festival. Noted for its consistent quality, and the depth and variety of its programming, it includes not just music, but dance, strolling theatre, visual arts, and an extensive range of speakers and discussion panels.

Last year this Festival-within-the-Festival drew a record 95,000 attendances over the four days and nights and, in 2016, in David Sefton's somewhat downsized Adelaide Festival program, it is very much the major event for the final weekend.

WOMADelaide Operations and Program Manager, Annette Tripodi has been putting the performance schedule together since 1999 and it is a new challenge every time. With six program blocks from Friday through to Monday night Tripodi looks to identify headliners and build the jigsaw around them. As she explains:

"That's the ideal – the artists who take the longest time to secure, and who cost the most, are the most prominent names and sometimes they come in at the last minute and it all works. But you are always looking, at the beginning of the programming cycle, at who's going to be the anchor of the night. That changes and changes and it has a snowball effect on everything else .

"We start with a list of key headliner internationals and then another list of excellent internationals who are the typical WOMAD discoveries who have never played in Australia before. Where they play, and when, is affected by the headliners. So Friday night turns out to have three huge names and they are all once-onlies – Violent Femmes, The Cat Empire and Angelique Kidjo.

"Angelique Kidjo is a really interesting one for this coming festival because people have assumed she has done WOMAD before, but this is her first time. I have seen her in many phases- playing her first album, *Logozo*, in the early 90s in her very African guise, in a very slick French combination in WOMAD in England, in Adelaide venues like HQ and Thebarton. All of them were fantastic. This time is the orchestral show, which I have not seen before – it is its first time in Australia. It has taken months and months to wrangle- the conductor, the guest musicians, the 68 piece Adelaide Symphony Orchestra – and her."

Kidjo will perform a repertoire including new songs from her long-time collaborator, Jean Hebrail and works specifically composed for her by Phillip Glass.

WOMAD is not only an opportunity for new events but also triumphant returns. Popular live act The Cat Empire first played the after hours Wozone back in 2003 and by the time they returned in 2004 they were huge national favourites. Tripodi is enthusiastic about their return in 2016:

"They are an exceptional live band, they can hold a Stage One audience of 20,000, they are much-loved and superb musicians. They love the festival, and even though they are on a big tour to promote their new album, they have all made time to stay over at the festival. They were 19 when they first played and now they are in their 30s, married with children." Just like the ever-ageing and expanding WOMAD audience, one might add.

"We are trying with each festival to have a completely different program from the year before. " Tripodi explains. "But coming back after a break in 2015, I realised Big Day Out is no more, Soundwave is no more, and Future Music is no more . Not that we have had the same audiences, but there is some crossover and it's alarming how these mega festivals have crashed and burned.

"I think part of the reason for our ongoing success, and the real love and devotion people have, is that it isn't the same line-up every time and there's a huge amount that goes into 'the experience'. It's not just - put a headline on the stage. People have really started to *get* that in the past five years."

Another headline band, newly drawn to the WOMAD fold, is the Milwaukee, Wisconsin indie band, Violent Femmes. Tripodi is keen – "they are an iconic band, they've re-formed, and released an album. The timing was perfect for Adelaide. Here, they are going to get a really good audience – and the right audience."

Casting her eye across the other nights' once-only lead acts, Tripodi points out, on Saturday night, the late 80s hip-hop favourites De La Soul, touring with new material – upcoming 2016 albums include *And the Anonymous Nobody* and *Premium Soul on the Rocks.* Also, returning after previously performing at the festival with Kronos Quartet in 2008, is Indian singing legend Asha Bhosle. At 84 she still tours and regularly records new albums. With a career which began in 1943, to call her prolific and enduring is an understatement. She will perform with her Bollywood mini-orchestra featuring vocals from her grand-daughter and an entourage which includes her son and daughter –in law.

Sunday night will showcase another of Annette Tripodi's favourites – St Germain , a shapeshifting musical entity which revolves around French house and nu jazz musician, Ludovic Navarre. "I'm very excited about them. They were last seen when they toured here in 2001. We can expect a dynamic, high quality show with all the beats and grooves but also very fine musicians."

Several names are contenders for top of the bill on Monday night. As is the WOMADelaide tradition, a major afrobeat band holds the stage. This year it is Seun Kuti, 33 year old son of Nigerian legend and political activist, the late Fela Kuti. With his band, Egypt 80, which includes members and compatriots of Fela Kuti's group, Seun Kuti will perform from his 2014 CD, *A Long Way From the Beginning.*

Also on the final night bill is English electronica outfit, Asian Dub Foundation. Founded in Hackney, London in 1993 they are long time big beat, drum and bass favourites. Led by Steve Chandra Savale (aka Chandrasonic) and including Sun-J, Pandit G, and Rocky Singh among others, they will perform across their repertoire (including *Fortress Europe*, I hope) and their most recent studio album – *More Signal More Noise*.

But as Annette Tripodi has remarked, the challenge of programming is finding the best settings and opportunities to highlight new talents and sounds, those WOMAD favourites no one has heard of yet.

Among those which have caught my attention are Tulegur from China, a duo featuring guitarist Zongcan and throat-singing vocalist Gangzi. Their evocatively lyrical album, *Wind Grass Sound* is Mongolian pastoral but as Annette Tripodi observes, in concert, they almost sound like Nirvana.

Also young, fresh and strong on the beats are 47 Soul, Middle Eastern dance cross-over from Palestine, Jordan and Syria. Alsarah and The Nubatones from Sudan/USA also promise lively fusions . And, a likely surprise is singer/songwriter John Grant, formerly of the The Czars, now based in Iceland. His album, *Grey Tickles, Black Pressure* (an Icelandic nickname for depression) explores his clashes with addiction and sardonically reflects on surviving the experience.

Women have always held up more than their half of the WOMAD sky. This year there are sister acts, Mahsa and Marjan Vahdat from Iran (their album *Twinklings of Hope*, is aptly named) along with Ibeji - identical twins, Naomi and Lisa-Kainde Diaz, daughters of Buena Vista Social Club musician Anga Diaz, linking Cuba, Paris and West African Yoruba percussion. Another rising star is Ester Rada whose debut CD promises a vibrant, jazzy performance on Stage One on Saturday night. Sarah Blasko heads the Australian talent, along with All My Exes Live in Texas, and the much-praised young singer, Samba the Great, from Zambia but now resident here.

Other Australian performers featured in the Festival include legendary singer songwriter Kev Carmody, reggae band The Strides and Adelaide unit Wasted Wanderers. Marlon Williams and the Yarra Benders, riding high on recent gigs including Day on the Green, will also have an eager following.

Folk and post folk music is a constant component at WOMADelaide, although given the rich talents from the UK and Ireland, as well as the profusion of interesting Americana bands, many more could be included. Nevertheless, this year, we will be well served by trance folk minimalists Spiro, Australian duo Husky, The Once, and fellow Canadians, The Jerry Cans.

The Cedric Burnside Project, a duo featuring drummer Cedric (grandson of the blues great, R.L.Burnside) and guitarist Trenton Ayres will mix blues with hip-hop and funk, while Malian quartet Songhoy Blues blend US guitar styles with West African rhythms in a once-only set on Monday Night at Stage Three.

There are always some performers who, even on first cursory hearing, demand further attention. Greek vocalist Savina Yannatou and her great band Primavera en Salonico is one such example. She returns after a seven year break and is not to be missed. Neither are Calexico, mixing mariachi with country music, Tucson Arizona-style, featuring their ninth album, *Edge of the Sun*. Jazz influenced Colombian harpist Edmar Casteneda features with his trio on Monday night at the Zoo Stage. Also essential listening is charismatic classical flamenco singer Diego El Cigala, performing late on Saturday at the Moreton Bay Stage and, on Friday night, Indian virtuoso slide guitarist Debashish Battacharya will present a meditative late night set at the Zoo Stage.

Annette Tripodi's 2016 WOMADelaide program is full to the brim. The world has come to visit - and it's sounding good all over again.

WOMADelaide runs from March 11-14 at Botanic Park, Adelaide.

Daily Review, March 2, 2016.

All Delighted Audience

Published: 2016-03-03 *Adelaide Festival · Music*

Sufjan Stevens Thebarton Theatre Adelaide Festival February 29, 2016

Murray Bramwell

Last time we saw Sufjan Stevens it was his 2011 *Age of Adz* tour. Inspired by the paintings of the schizophrenic visionary Royal Robertson, the concert featured massive back projections of Robertson's ecstatic, vibrantly coloured imaginings while Stevens and a ten piece band produced a symphonic event, festooned with samples, loops and intrepid orchestrations.

For his 2016 tour Sufjan Stevens is in lyric mode. With just four band members this time, he is showcasing last year's album, *Carrie and Lowell*, his most personal album to date and, in the minds of many, his best. Stevens is a mercurial talent and like say, Prince or Beck, he can, chameleon-like, effortlessly inhabit a variety of contemporary forms from pop to prog to acoustic ballad, psychedelia and post-folk. The constants in Stevens' music are his sweet keening vocal, his open-tuned guitar and banjo, and his incorporation of synths, piano, horns and angelic harmonies.

On stage at the Thebarton Theatre, Stevens and his associates open with *Redford*, an instrumental composition from *Michigan.* The band creates a weave of sounds – guitar, piano, trombone, percussion. It is a soothing, but inviting overture, setting the mood for what is to follow.

And what follows are the first trickling guitar notes of *Death With Dignity,* opening track to *Carrie and Lowell*. "Spirit of my silence I can hear you / But I'm afraid to be near you" Stevens sings in his soft, burred, mesmerising way- "And I don't know where to begin."

But begin he does, embarking on a set of songs, written after the death of his mother, Carrie in 2012. They are self-explorations, sometimes excoriating, sometimes plain bereft. These expressions of loss, anger, and bewilderment reflect the fact that he is trying to retrieve a mother he hardly knew, who left him when he was one year old.

Raised by his father and stepmother in an interfaith counterculture community in Michigan, Stevens rarely saw his mother who, living in Oregon with Lowell Brams, her second husband, suffered bipolar illness and bouts of drug dependence. When she was diagnosed with stomach cancer he visited her in hospital until her death. The songs describe his attempts to recover memories and unravel feelings, both repressed and lost to time.

I can think of few songwriters who cut as close to the emotional bone as Sufjan Stevens does in the *Carrie and Lowell* suite. Many singers draw on personal material – Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell, James Taylor in the 60s and 70s delved their own experiences, but the results were, more often than not, encrypted and at arm's length. *Blood on the Tracks* is the closest Dylan example, Joni Mitchell's *Blue* is her most directly revelatory work and Taylor said it all in one song – *Fire and Rain*. John Lennon's Plastic Ono solo album is a primal cry from the heart, Loudon Wainwright is sardonically, almost compulsively, frank - and now, younger singers like Will Oldham and William Fitzsimmons are also Stevens' fellow travellers.

The real comparisons with Sufjan's *Carrie and Lowell,* though, are American confessional poets like Sylvia Plath and Robert Lowell, writing about family, anguish and self-harm. Lowell called his ground-breaking volume, *Life Studies* – vignettes of his parents, his marriage, his dreads and anxieties described in plain candour ; stark, courageous, sometimes wry - and, like all genuine confrontations with the troubled self : healing and celebratory in their rediscovery of purpose.

Death with Dignity is a remarkable song in that it describes grief as a child might experience it – paradoxically, as a mystery, an impossible finality. It is not self pitying, sentimental or mawkish: "I forgive you mother, I can hear you/And I long to be near you/ But every road leads to an end…Your apparition passes through me in the willows: Five red hens - you'll never see us again."

As the musicians conjure a modal web of guitar, piano and pedal steel, digital projections – a flickering slideshow of old family photos, glimpses of the baby Sufjan and his parents - appear in what seem like a series of cathedral windows or a huge illuminated picket fence. Light floods in to the hall, identifying us to the performers as well. This could have been portentous and self-regarding but Stevens judges it perfectly. He is a quiet mystic, modest in manner and able to heft emotional weight. These experiences are about him, but they are also about us, and he astutely reminds us so.

A cluster of songs follow- the regretful *Should Have Known Better* –"My black shroud… I should've wrote a letter/Explaining what I feel" – the vocals are on echo, processed, otherworldly, while Casey Foubert's electric guitar churns in rhyme with Stephen Moore's harmonium keyboard chords.

And there is Sufjan, in his signature wacky green trucker hat and a black t-shirt emblazoned with almost luminous silver cross-hatchings. The hall lights are up again. It is like a revival show but it's not selling any afterlife except the rest of the one we already have.

All of Me Wants All of You – with its memories of Oregon landscapes: "Saw myself on Spencer's Butte /landscape changed my point of view" - has the band really opening up with a more enveloping sound than the album version. Foubert unleashes a wash of pedal effects , James Mcalister's percussion grows louder, along with piano and synths, and an extended, trippy, psychedelic jam unfolds, complete with purple haze lighting and the forlorn repetition of "All of me wants all of you".

The exact sequence from the album is broken with a switch to *The Only Thing*, the most openly fraught song, it reveals Stevens' crisis of faith and dread at what he has to contemplate. It is histrionic to say "Should I tear my eyes out now ?" but maybe it is the understatement of the vocal delivery which offsets a sense of excess.

In an age of bombastic self-regard and religious simple-mindedness, for any artist, describing the dark night of the soul is perilous, both personally and aesthetically. Sufjan Stevens, perhaps because he determinedly shies away from talking directly about questions of faith, is better able than most to explore the elusive subject of transcendence.

In this carefully managed set list the inclusion of *The Owl and Tanager* from *All Delighted People* is a switch but not a departure from the emotional narrative. The playful refrain between the two birds (a tanager is a generic for a songbird) and the shreds of childhood recollection in the song are beautifully managed with multiple harmonies from Stevens, Dawn Landes and Foubert with the band opening out in a swoon of synthesisers.

Four more key songs follow- *Eugene*, another mix of Oregon memory and deathbed reality –"What's the point of singing songs/If they'll never even hear you" And, the highpoint of the set*, Fourth of July*, with its plaintive opening piano notes (echoes of Elbow's *Puncture Repair* and Fitzsimmons' *The Sparrow and the Crow*) its irresistible melody and lambent lyrics – "It was night when you died, my firefly/What could I have said to raise you from the dead ?"

It is a tender song of comfort and harsh truth from mother to son – My little hawk, why do you cry? We're all gonna die. " The final refrain repeated in ever widening circles as the sweet harmonies turn into a full crescendo with sprays of light and a gathering drumbeat. Again, a moment that could have toppled into bathos, becomes one of affirmation instead.

No Shade in the Shadow of the Cross again questions the central tenets of resurrection and, at last, the title song - *Carrie and Lowell*, is again accompanied by flickering Super 8 footage of his two families, including his stepfather Lowell. Accompanied on guitar and ukulele , the harmonies between Stevens and Dawn Landes, like much of the album, echo the very best of early Simon and Garfunkel. It is hovering on the edge of icky pop , but always carefully judged, the melody and lyric are triumphantly sublime .

Stevens and his splendid band complete the set with *Vesuvius*, a free form drumming blast from *The Age of Adz, Futile Devices* and one last word from *Carrie and Lowell, Blue Bucket of Gold* - referring to an Oregon story of miners who found gold but didn't recognise it at the time - and then couldn't find the site again.

The tune builds from simple piano chords to a full scale repeating finale – "Raise your right hand /tell me you want me in your life " - with a long (perhaps over long) double spray of white laser light into the auditorium, drawing us towards two portals like a near death experience. It verges on interminable but, of course, like much else in the show its theatrics are intriguing and strangely comforting.

For the encore section, covering another six songs, the mood changes almost completely. The five musicians gather around a single microphone like an old-timey country music show. All play acoustic instruments – and Sufjan gets out his familiar banjo.

The selections are from *Michigan* and *Seven Swans* - and they sing *Heirloom* from *All Delighted People*. They have Emily Dickinson length titles – *All The Trees of the Field Will Clap Their Hands , For the Widows in Paradise, For the Fatherless in Ypsilanti*. Stevens adds *The Dress looks Nice on You* and perhaps as a kind of in-joke*, Casimir Pulaski Day*, referring to the local public holiday in Chicago commemorating a hero of the American Revolution. It falls on the first Monday in March which would have been the night of our concert – if it hadn't been a Leap Year.

During the encores Stevens speaks to the audience for the first time, disarmingly telling self-deprecating anecdotes about his father's belief in Edgar Cayce's Past Lives and the reincarnation of family pets . He also says he's been listening to Stevie Wonder's *Songs in the Key of Life* and muses ironically whether his show might be called songs in the key of death.

He needn't have worried. This singular talent has, in a pop concert, tangled with large and elusive questions with intelligence, wit and an open heart. It is a risky venture and he succeeds. I call that a wonder. And these beautifully performed songs are Sufjan Stevens' life studies .

The Barefoot Review, March 3, 2016.

Marriage viewed uncomfortably and kaleidoscopic cautionary tale

Published: 2016-03-09 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Adelaide Festival

The Country by Martin Crimp Stone/Castro in association with Insite Arts International, State Opera of SA and Adelaide Festival. State Opera Studio, 216 Marion Rd, Netley March 7. Tickets: $ 25 - $ 36 Bookings : adelaidefestival.com.au BASS 131246. Until March 13. Duration 90 minutes, no interval.

Golem 1927, co-production with Salzburg Festival, Theatre de la Ville Paris and Young Vic. Dunstan Theatre, Adelaide Festival Centre. March 8. Tickets: $30 - $59 Bookings : adelaidefestival.com.au BASS 131246. Until March 13. Duration 90 minutes, no interval. Sydney Theatre Company season March 16 -19, Roslyn Packer Theatre.

From the opening lines of UK playwright Martin Crimp's *The Country* there is a strangeness, a suppressed menace and ambiguity, in even the simplest utterance. Richard, a doctor, has moved to a refurbished granary in the English countryside with his wife Corinne and their young children. But their pastoral idyll is not as it seems, especially when it is revealed he has brought a young, unconscious woman into their house.

In Stone/Castro's captivating production, director Paulo Castro has deftly revealed the emotional pain and betrayal which is present, but only indirectly acknowledged, in Crimp's coolly astringent mystery-thriller. Nothing is naturalistic in the production style, props, including a toy cat, are used unrealistically, intriguingly everything is very slightly skewed. David Lampard's set (seductively lit by Daniel Barber) is half constructed cutaway plywood, through which we peer at the elusive, slow-release narrative.

Nathan O'Keefe and Jo Stone are outstanding as Richard and Corinne, expertly delivering Crimp's carefully shaped dialogue, where every statement is tested, weighed, doubted, confirmed and then interrogated again. It is a discomforting portrait of a marriage under siege from inconvenient truths. Natalia Sledz is also memorable as the young Rebecca, caught in a situation she cannot control. *The Country* is challenging and absorbing Festival drama.

Golem, the 1927 Company's multi-media live action phantasmagoria about humankind and its machines, is as sardonic as it is imaginative. Written and directed by Suzanne Andrade using film, clay animation and designs by Paul Barritt, *Golem* takes the Jewish folk tale of a man who makes a creature out of clay to be his servant, and spins it into a retro 1980s setting with strong 21st century relevance.

Geeky code analyst for Binary Backup, Robert Robertson (Shamira Turner) leads a drab live in the shadow of his sister, Annie (Esme Appleton) until he buys a life size clay Golem from his dodgy inventor friend Phil Sylocates. Things begin to change as the Golem develops a mind of its own, or rather, promotes the messages of media and advertising, and begins moulding his owner's increasingly conformist tastes and attitudes. In no time Robert draws away from his workmates, leaves his sister's punk band The Underdogs and, after trading up to the Golem Version 2, starts listening to U2.

The swipes at Apple, Microsoft and franchised fashion are clear enough, but this production makes its strongest point by the sheer exuberance, originality and anti-digital aesthetic of its colourful, kaleidoscopic visual style. With heavy eye makeup, black-framed 1920s spectacles and frizzy wigs the performers look like silent movie actors. The zany music is played live by composer Lillian Henley and percussionist Will Close. *Golem* is a funny-sad cautionary tale that gets us hoping outside the square. It is a final week Festival highlight.

Murray Bramwell

"Marriage viewed uncomfortably and kaleidoscopic cautionary tale", The Australian, March 10, 2016, p.15.

Light and heat in Adelaide Fringe

Published: 2017-02-22 *Adelaide Fringe*

Adelaide Fringe Theatre

Scorch by Stacey Gregg Prime Cut Productions February 15. Holden Street Theatres until March 19

Angel by Henry Naylor Redbeard Productions February 15. Holden Street Theatres until March 19

We Live by the Sea by Alex Howarth and Cast Patch of Blue February 17. The Black Forest, Royal Croquet Club Until March 19.

Bookings : adelaidefringe.com.au or phone 1300 621 255.

The Fringe has once again inundated Adelaide's inner city and environs and, after Saturday night's luminous parade, is open for strolling business. The Garden of Unearthly Delights and Gluttony return to familiar sites at the East End and the Royal Croquet Club has now set up its tents by the River Torrens.

The Fringe program lists 1357 events and, second only to Edinburgh in its scale, offers an uncurated smorgasbord ranging, as ever, from the sublimely extraordinary to the potentially horrendous. In theatre alone there are 149 listings in locations including The Bakehouse, GC at the German Club, and Tandanya.

Holden Street Theatres, guided by Martha Lott, have again scheduled excellent productions, including sponsoring recent Fringe award winners from Edinburgh. Scorch, by Belfast writer Stacey Gregg, and vibrantly performed in the round by Amy McAllister, is a revealing, sometimes confronting, depiction of Kes, a teenage girl gender-transitioning to the boy world.

Gregg's narrative swirls with hip hop cadences, social media namechecks and Irish patois, as Kes (named for the Ken Loach film about a boy and a kestrel) finds a soulmate and falls disastrously into legal peril in the innocent pursuit of love." I flew too close to a star," Kes says, and the audience feels the heat. Scorch is splendidly poised, and McAllister is outstanding.

Following last year's Echoes, Holden Street is presenting another play from the trilogy Arabian Nightmares by UK writer Henry Naylor. Angel also is topical and gives a human voice to the Syrian crisis as Rehana, a young woman from Kobane in Northern Syria abandons her studies in law to join a women's militia and rescue her father who has remained to repel ISIS attacks on their besieged town. Based on actual events, Angel describes how Rehana became a lethal sniper and a mythic hero of the resistance to Islamic State.

Tautly directed by Michael Cabot, this monologue is fresh, sometimes funny, suspenseful, and compellingly presented by Avital Lvova, as she describes the catastrophic events which changed Rehana's situation from ordinary, secular Westernised life as a student to the killing fields of cruel and barbaric invasion. Angel is another early Fringe four star highlight.

We Live by the Sea, researched and written by Alex Howarth, in collaboration with the cast of Yorkshire company, Patch of Blue, is a richly detailed, gently presented study of autism as experienced by Katie (memorably played by Alex Brain) a high school student parented by her loving , often exasperated, sister Hannah (Alexandra Simonet). Katie has an invisible friend (made visible by Lizzie Grace) and meets Ryan (Tom Coliandris) who has demons of his own.

While candidly portraying the difficulties and isolating effects of autism, this play captures the intensity and originality of Katie's experiences and the warmth and insight she brings to others. Tender, but never mawkish, with a lyrical musical score, We Live by the Sea is an excursion well worth taking.

Murray Bramwell

"Light and heat in the Adelaide Fringe" The Australian, February 22, 2017, p.15.

Adelaide Fringe 2017 Report

Published: 2017-02-24 *Adelaide Fringe*

Murray Bramwell

The Adelaide Fringe has been going more than a week now and has spread its ever-larger network around the city. With more than 1300 events, 5,200 participating artists and an estimated turnout of 75,000 punters at the opening weekend parade, the proud claim to being second only to Edinburgh's mega-Fringe event is further strengthened. The number of events clamouring for attention is astonishing – 290 comedy shows, 248 music performances, 143 theatre listings , 132 cabaret events and 43 circus and physical theatre productions.

And, as always, the Fringe has its familiar precincts – The Garden of Unearthly Delights is set up in East End's Rundle Park like a pop-up village, with fun fair rides, bars and food kiosks, and exotic retail. And, of course, its familiar tents and spiegeltents offer the usual canny mix of household TV comedy faces, hyper-manic burlesque shows, and off-beat eccentrics all spruiking for attention.

Across the way in Rymill Park, Gluttony has 102 acts in seven venues also capturing the roaming throng, while, over in nearby Grenfell Street, Tandanya is hosting events throughout the season. At Holden Street Theatres, Martha Lott has again assembled a program of theatre, comedy and cabaret. As in previous years HST is sponsoring and hosting UK productions selected by Lott from the best of last year's Edinburgh Fringe – including two outstanding monologues – Scorch by Stacey Gregg and Henry Naylor's new work, *Angel*.

Moving from its previous location in Victoria Square to the section of the Torrens riverbank known as Pinky Flat, The Royal Croquet Club has had a new lease of life with a more extensive layout and the Adelaide Oval footbridge to deliver the flow of Fringe dwellers visiting the more than 40 shows at 6 venues.

The Adelaide Fringe will run for 32 days until March 19. Here are some highlights so far.

Acrobat Menagerie, Royal Croquet Club February 19.

"Old acrobats become clowns. So be it." So say Jo Lancaster and Simon Yates, founding members and movers and shakers in a 22 year circus theatre project that has broken rules and redefined almost every convention of physical entertainment. Back at the Adelaide Fringe for the first time in nine years with a new show, *It's Not for Everyone*, Acrobat are still bending hearts and minds and flipping them back to us, to make of ...what we will.

Arriving at the edge of the Menagerie tent stage, are two codgers in clown costume. He's on his trick cycle, with a pink button nose and wearing an ancient bike helmet and a floral shirt. She's in a helmet too, on top of a red fright wig and is sporting a particoloured mishmash of florals and stripes as she hauls a supermarket trolley full of stuff and tries unsuccessfully to hoist it on to the stage.

From there the show - animated by sound designer Tim Barrass' splendid fizzling, squelching, klaxon honking, music and effects tape - takes off. The two performers break out into bike stunts, pratfalls, Punch and Judy squabbling and other irresistibly funny clowning routines. Yates struts self importantly, Lancaster has a fixed expression of puzzlement and covert resistance. He sits in a chair while she pours improbable objects down his throat, his stomach inflates and he gives birth to a balloon amidst a cacophony of wheezing and farting.

The pace is brilliantly managed with split-second sound cues and blackouts. There are buzzers, pedals and gizmos all around the stage ready to be release looney tunes, chook noises and other aural and visual ambushes.

And, as the clown costumes are taken off, the show spreads out into a series of unpredictable tangents – beauty pageants, satirising body image with cardboard cut-outs and slogans : "Get less ugly". The physicality becomes more menacing as tensions emerge. While a record plays with a cheesy crooner singing "You and Me Together", Yates is hauling Lancaster upside down with an aerial strap on one ankle, like a carcass ready for filleting. This is bitter clowning and the meanings are sinister and unflinching.

But the shifts of focus are fast and fascinating. With a series of nano- second blackouts, Lancaster presents herself as a slideshow series of snapshot images – "This is me – objectified, this is me- commodified; matching top knickers in a knot; transparent; out of focus." It is so simple, and wonderfully smart.

Calling their show *It's Not for Everyone* suggests a challenge to the audience but with its theatrical flair and invention, it is one easily taken up. Even as they morph from daffy entertainers on a bike to wrestling bodies smeared in mud, there is a sense that we are being presented with a series of very understandable yet absurdist propositions. Lancaster and Yates are like Estragon and Vladimir in *Godot*, or maybe Hamm and Clov in their dustbins in *Endgame*. No wonder Samuel Beckett loved clowns so much. He would have loved Acrobat.

FIVE stars

Butt Kapinski Campanile, The Garden of Unearthly Delights February 22.

Appearing through the curtain in fedora and trench coat comes Deanna Fleysher aka Butt Kapinski, film noir hero and self-described private dick. With a battered reading lamp incongruously sprouting out of his coat collar, Butt not only provides his own moody chiaroscuro but is able to shine a bright light on the dirty deeds in the naked city.

Butt Kapinski is an honest joe staring down the crooked cops, crazed junkies, priests, Mexicans, and psychopathic murderers that have jumped from the pages of American pulp writers such as Mickey Spillane, Ellery Queen , Raymond Chandler and James Ellroy.

The audience is recruited to play bit parts and provide the soundtrack. Someone is given a microphone to add beatbox FX and jazz trumpet flourishes while Kapinski meanders through the crime scenes, flashes his lamp in unsuspecting faces, moving constantly between our chairs – at the same time defining the tropes of film noir cinema and its relation to American culture in the 1940s.

Deanna Fleysher cleverly navigates the improvisational chaos that she creates and the audience loves the gentle, conspiratorial comedy, as well as the gender satire and political topicality. Her Kapinski is a deadpan gumshoe with the voice of Elmer Fudd and the heart of Phillip Marlowe. He is hilarious. But there is more. Butt Kapinski is on a mission of deconstruction.

FOUR Stars

Coral Browne: This F***ing Lady Written and directed by Maureen Sherlock GC (German Club, Flinders St.) February 23.

The story of Coral Browne has all the hallmarks of legend. Born in 1913 in Footscray in Melbourne she became a leading actor in the Australian theatre by the time she was seventeen. By the age of twenty one she had emigrated to England with fifty quid, a letter of introduction from Dame Sybil Thorndike and her mother in tow.

In London she added an E to her surname and proceeded to make her way in the West End. She played opposite matinee idol, Jack Buchanan, one of the many loves in her life, began film acting in 1936, and, with money borrowed from her dentist, made a packet producing the first London production of *The Man Who Came for Dinner* in 1941.

It is no wonder – and our good fortune - that playwright Maureen Sherlock saw the potential for her engaging and enlightening monologue, *This F***ing Lady*. Browne was a fabulous gossip, a prodigious and emancipated lover, and an unending source of "bon and four letter mots". Her bisexual affairs and friendships were those of a free spirit, and her candour and salty epithets both terrifying and exhilarating.

Performed with impish vivacity by Genevieve Mooy, the portrait begins with Browne in 1984, at age 71, winning the BAFTA award for her performance as herself in Alan Bennett's brilliant TV drama about the spy Guy Burgess, *An Englishman Abroad*.

Mooy captures Browne's forensic wit, her carefree sexuality, and her deep commitment to the two men she married - Philip Pearman who died at 53, and Vincent Price, the grand guignol horror star whom she met on the set of *Theatre of Blood* and married in 1974. She also plays the role of Browne's difficult and manipulative mother, who never acknowledged the achievements of her dutiful only child and peevishly undermined her until death at the age of 99.

This is a lively portrait of a remarkable woman and a slice of theatre history that is rich in incident and anecdote. Maureen Sherlock has vivdly reminded us about an Australian actress whose sixty years of fame were largely unknown in her own country. *Coral Browne: This F***ing Lady* definitely deserves a life beyond the Fringe.

FOUR stars

Posted in *Daily Review*, 24 February, 2017.

The Best of the Adelaide Fringe(So Far) # 2

Published: 2017-03-02 *Adelaide Fringe · Comedy*

Daily Review More Adelaide Fringe

Murray Bramwell

Fauna Ukiyo, Royal Croquet Club February 26. FOUR stars

The creatures in *Fauna* have come from a variety of circus habitats. Matt Basquet has a background in martial arts and acro/movement. Imogen Huzel, also from the UK but based in Stockholm, has links with the Belgian Poive Rose company; Finnish trapeze artiste, Enni Maria Lymi works with NoFit State Circus; and the married duo - Rhiannon Cave-Walker (a member of Gravity & Other Myths) and her partner, Daniel Cave-Walker, hail from Byron Bay and Bristol respectively.

This impressive quintet has joined forces for their premiere venture at the Royal Croquet Club, in collaboration with percussive guitarist Geordie Little, from Adelaide, now currently based in Berlin.

“Switch off your devices and switch on your cerebrals “ the show announces as all five glide in slow motion unison bathed in pastel light. A statement about *Fauna* being a place of discovery disintegrates into deliberate gibberish as the performers break off into a series of impressive routines – handstands, splits, flips, duet cartwheels, precarious workouts on hand balancing stands and dynamic trapeze stunts.

Fauna are a highly-skilled troupe and on stage with them, Geordie Little’s nimble guitar accompaniment, along with a range of FX pedals, loops and other phase effects completes the virtuosic spectacle.

As the company undertakes a succession of dazzling acrobatics, some of it akin to dance choreography, various animal personas are presented. Pecking orders are established, males lock horns in rivalry, mateship rituals are played out and predators and foragers challenge the status quo.

But this is where the ambition of the narrative is perhaps not equal to the technical excellence of the piece. In parts where expressive acting is required the work becomes self-conscious and awkwardly solemn when playful humour would better serve.

We are told, by voiceover, belatedly in the performance, that *Fauna* is exploring instinctual, primal animal behaviours. But, like the abandoned introduction, it seems ponderous and insufficient commentary. *Fauna* either needs more dramaturgy or none at all. The company’s physical gifts are splendid enough - especially the group set pieces which conclude the performance. Maybe the best way to describe our inner mammal is to lighten up a little.

I Am Somebody Sirqus Alfon Ukiyo, Royal Croquet Club February 26. FOUR stars

An image of an antiquated computer appears on a large screen: the words read : Sirqus Alfon, with a dot matrix message inviting us to use our phones throughout the performance and post videos on social media with the Sirqus hashtag. Everything here is public domain. The show is called *I am Somebody* and its exuberant intention is to make everyone part of the entertainment.

Presented by an endearingly hyper-manic trio of musical pranksters - Babham, Emilio, and Ejve (a.k.a. Martin Ostman and Erik Rosales, from Sweden, plus Norwegian Henrik Strindberg) - this is circus with an S, pumped with techno pop, performed against back-projections of vintage Nintendo games from the pixellated 80s, and featuring delightfully inventive audience interaction.

Dressed in pastel military tunics, they look like clowns from a banana republic. With name patches on their lapels and 1950s soda fountain caps they take up instruments – megaphone, electric bass and a baby drum kit - and caper like a boy band. It is clever and fast and fun.

They simulate a boxing fight inside giant computer graphics from Nintendo’s KO or something similar, they spray webs of lasers through the crowd and perform air drum solos in perfect sync with the well-drilled soundtrack.

Babham has the crowd singing *I am Somebody*- like an anthem at a revival meeting. It is satiric. But when he puts his phone on a selfie stick and films the crowd and the images instantly spring up on the big screen, it makes participation feel like a nice idea.

Later, he takes us through a number of disconnected gestures, including miming the bowing action on a violin, and films it all. We are distracted by a funny old Three Stooges clown act with a stolen banana, and then in quick succession, a rapid edit with added sound effects and zany music turns the random video footage of the audience into an orchestral celebration and a memento of a night at the retro-cyber circus.

Sirqus Alfon are brimming with low tech/ high tech bright ideas. The green lasers plucked like instrument strings create a lyrical effect and the daffy Olympic acrobatics, simulated by the trio lying on the floor and their moves projected vertically on to the screen, is low comedy so inviting that members of the audience jumped up and had a shot at it too. In this show, being a big screen somebody is irresistible. .

Hannah Gadsby: Nanette The Factory, The Garden of Unearthly Delights February 24. FOUR stars

Hannah Gadsby has called her latest show: *Nanette*. As she says, she needed a title and that’s what came up. But there’s more to it than that. Gadsby recalls going into an un-named café in an unidentified small town in regional Australia and the sign on the counter read ; “Today’s barista is Nanette. “ Nanette, she recalls had a kind face- the kind of face you could chop wood on. The encounter was fleeting, unfriendly, and dismissive. And took Gadsby back to her early life growing up as an often ostracised outsider, as a young unfeminine-looking lesbian woman, in North West Tasmania.

Gadsby’s narrative is a stream of very cogent consciousness. She has an effortlessly comic gift and the laughs come readily. But here also there is a persistent and often disturbing thread of sadness which is never far from the surface. She makes it clear that she is not finding her usual humorous groove. I hate comedy, she says flatly, it’s a joke. Laughter is not the best medicine . She’d recommend penicillin.

Recent events have some bearing on her perspective, she notes. Like when she wrote an uncharacteristically forthright Facebook post condemning the idea of the Australian plebiscite to determine legislation on same-sex marriage. Being hostage to the Nanettes of the world made her gloomy- and angry - and the viral impact of her on-line comments unexpectedly drew her into a different kind of public prominence. Including being invited to write an op-ed column for The New York Times.

Buoyed by her late grandmother’s favourite expression – “It’s all part of the soup. It’s too late to take out the onions now “, Hannah Gadsby broods on the way she used jokes to deflect the pain of coming out as a homosexual woman, and to repress and reframe and deep and abiding abuses and traumas in her teens and early twenties. She realises she does want to take the onions out of the soup - and is close to tears as she does so.

Encouraged by a strongly supportive audience, Hannah Gadsby is taking the comedy format into personal/political territory that is beyond jokes and deals with a very different kind of punch line. It seems to have its own disturbing momentum, but is also articulate and skilfully managed. She is testing boundaries and, at times, steps over them, at some risk to herself . But Gadsby is lighting up dark and nasty corners and exorcising those demons of covert, unpunished sexual abuse that are very much in the public mind in Australia at the present time.

Despite the gravity of some of the subject matter, Hannah Gadsby also memorably steers her way through the kind of droll, witty material that only she can deliver. And Nanette does come back at the end. Go and see this brave, socially incisive and mordantly funny show - and find out for yourself what happens next.

“The Best of the Adelaide Fringe(So Far) # 2”, *Daily Review*, March 2, 2017.

Echoes of history in the quarry

Published: 2017-03-02 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Adelaide Festival BRIEF Echoes of history in the quarry

The Secret River by Kate Grenville Adapted for the stage by Andrew Bovell A Sydney Theatre Company Production Presented by Adelaide Festival and State Theatre Company South Australia Anstey Hill Quarry, Adelaide March 2. Until March 19.

The revival, for the 2017 Adelaide Festival, of Sydney Theatre Company's *The Secret River,* adapted for the stage by Andrew Bovell from the novel by Kate Grenville, has proved to be its transformation. Director Neil Armfield has always said it was a work in progress and now, with this transfixing production, we can see how far it has come.

Grenville's fictionalised version of her forebears claiming land along the Hawkesbury River is a grim account of miscommunication, conflict and murder between European settlers and the Aboriginal communities whose land had been invaded. It also proposes a view that some tragedies could have been averted. It is story of multiple perspectives, some contested, that challenge all who encounter it.

The Anstey Hill Quarry near Tea Tree Gully has an important place in Adelaide Festival history. In 1980 the legendary Peter Brook's company performed, *Conference of the Birds*, there, followed in 1988 by his epic work, *The Mahabharata*. State Theatre CEO, Rob Brookman worked on both those ventures and had no difficulty persuading Festival directors, Neil Armfield and Rachel Healy, to return to Anstey Hill to stage *The Secret River*. The result has been a triumph.

Designer Stephen Curtis has the benefit of a spectacular thirty metre rock face, partly covered with scrub, as backdrop to his pale green performance space. And, once the sun has gone, Mark Howett's lighting captures texture and tints the night sky. The voices of the actors ring in the clear air –from Dhirrumbin's prologue (from the majestic Ningali Lawford Wolf) to the concluding, heart-rending sound of Shaka Cook singing Ngalamalum's lament.

The performances are excellent – Nathaniel Dean and Georgia Adamson as the hopeful pioneers, the Thornhills, Stephen Goldsmith, commanding as the elder Yalamundi, and Richard Piper, daubed in expressionist face paint, as the depraved Smasher Sullivan. Iain Grandage's live music score is superb and the set pieces of the Dharug ceremonies and the settlers' Blighty songs are impressively staged.

But no memory of this production is more enduring than the sound of muskets on Kaurna land, at a location so quintessentially Australian that the implications of the events that occurred at this river can never be secret again.

Murray Bramwell

Published in abridged form as "Echoes of history in the quarry" *The Australian*, March 6, 2017, p.12.

Rap by Richard, punk iconoclast

Published: 2017-03-04 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Adelaide Festival

Richard III by William Shakespeare Translation by Marius von Mayenburg Schaubuhne Berlin Her Majesty's Theatre. March 3. Until March 9 Bookings: adelaidefestival.com Tickets: $30-$99. Duration: 2 hrs 30 mins (no interval)

"I am determined to be a villain" proclaims Richard III, "And hate the idle pleasures of these days." In Thomas Ostermeier's latest, tantalising project with the Schaubune Berlin theatre, Richard is in the summer of his discontent. In Lars Eidinger's charismatic incarnation of the man who would be king of the House of York, the much reviled bottled spider, the bunch-backed toad, has become a more rangy joker with sinuous Iggy Pop energy and a prankster's smirk.

Amid a carousing party of King and courtiers, dressed in modern black suits and grooving to the music provided by on-stage drum wizard, Thomas Witte, Eidinger's Richard watches from the perimeter, dressed in a leather helmet, scruffy white t-shirt, and a giant black clown boot for his club foot.

As the music fades he leaps forward and grasps a microphone dangling from a hank of ragged electrical wire and begins his rap version, in English, of the winter of discontent soliloquy. He is an outsider, a punk iconoclast; Hamlet with the hump, and a chip on his shoulder as well. Later he asks: "Why be a king when you can be a god ? "Then sniggers conspiratorally at the audience and whispers : Eminem.

This version takes the famous set pieces in the play, such as Richard's reptilian seduction of Lady Anne across the corpse of her murdered husband, and winds them up a notch. To prove his penance he tears off his clothes and kneels naked in front of the flabbergasted Anne (Jenny Konig). Brandishing the sword he dares her to skewer him with it. When he asks us "was ever woman in this humor wooed ?" He points gloatingly to the surtitles for emphasis: "Or in this humor won ?"

The design by Jan Pappelbaum has a roughcast façade with a mezzanine walkway and a staircase for elevated royal proclamations and doorways for exiting political liquidations. Erich Schneider's often stark lighting and Sebastien Dupouey's grainy live-feed video close-ups of Richard serve the sense of impulsive, lethal anarchy in the narrative. Especially in Richard's dream before the battle of Bosworth Field. His terror at the ghosts of those he has murdered is one of very few concentrations of emotion in an otherwise off-hand picaresque account of a serial killer.

Letting Eidinger off his theatrical leash also has its thematic implications. His Machiavellian psychopathy drowns out the intricacies of the malevolence and treachery around him, although the humiliation of Buckingham (Moritz Gottwald) is powerfully realised.

The women are mostly pushed to the edge. Elizabeth (Eva Meckbach) has her lines trimmed and Robert Beyer (excellent as Catesby) reduces the depiction of Queen Margaret to a wig and a string of desultory curses. As for the Freudian complexities between the despised congenitally-deformed boy Richard and his wolfish mother, they don't get a look in.

Murray Bramwell

"Rap by Richard, punk iconoclast" *The Australian*, March 6, 2017, p.12.

Daily Review - WOMADelaide Celebrates

Published: 2017-03-06 *WOMADelaide · Music*

Daily Review

WOMADelaide Celebrates

Murray Bramwell talks with WOMADelaide director Ian Scobie about the music festival with a difference.

It is now 25 years since WOMADelaide, that strange acronym grafted on to the name of an Australian city, was first heard about. In 1992, as part of Rob Brookman's Adelaide Festival, negotiations took place between Brookman, his colleague Ian Scobie, and Thomas Brooman, the director of the UK WOMAD (aka World of Music, Arts and Dance) festival. The idea was to present a range of international music acts in a micro-festival inside the main Adelaide Festival.

It was all very new, and Scobie recalls they spent much time trying to describe what this venture would be like. Many of the artists – unheard of then, but legends of World Music now – were associated with WOMAD founder, Peter Gabriel's RealWorld record label . Youssou N'Dour from Senegal, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan and Remmy Ongala all performed in the first event, along with Crowded House, Not Drowning, Waving and The Pogues.

"I don't think Rob or I had any sense it would continue after the first event. Or maybe for a one-off afterwards," says Scobie. But continue it did. Featuring more Real World artists - Sheila Chandra and Geoffrey Oryema, as well as Peter Gabriel himself, priming the pump for ticket sales for the fledgling venture.

I asked Scobie what he thinks has contributed to the continuing success of this music festival when others, including Big Day Out, which also began in 1992, have fallen by the wayside.

"It had the sensibility of the Adelaide Festival. By that I mean its standard of presentation and the quality of the artists. In outdoor stage music at that time – let's say, presentation was a lower order of priority. Also the engagement with the artists. They were being 'hosted' within a festival context."

Maintaining those high production values, from the quality of the sound stages to the organisation of on-site amenities, has been a WOMADelaide hallmark and is one reason why the event has won Helpmann Awards for Best Contemporary Music Festival in 2002 and as recently as last year.

WOMAD is a highly ritualised experience. Many aspects of the organisation have evolved over 25 years but much has remained pleasingly familiar and as crowds walk through the gates they know the drill and head for their favourite venues and meeting places.

"Audiences have grown up with WOMAD and been touched by it." Scobie remarks, "they all carry that sense of ownership that has become what the festival now represents – as much as what the organisers can influence"

Scobie and his team, including Programming Manager, Annette Tripodi, maintain close links with the UK and other WOMAD operations: "We do take advice and feedback from each other but what we all recognise is that for the festivals to succeed they have to have the spirit of the place about them. WOMADelaide has a lot that is particular to it : because it is in Botanic Park, and because it is during the Adelaide Festival."

The importance of the location, Botanic Park, right in the Adelaide CBD, with its gum trees, enormous Moreton Bay Fig trees and its swathe of green grass, has made it an oasis in the heat of March days and nights in Adelaide. Until recently WOMAD has had exclusive use of the park for performances and its proximity and natural beauty greatly enhances the appeal of the festival.

But while some things stay the same, much has also evolved since WOMAD became an annual event in 2002 and then extended to a four day fixture (on the newly established Adelaide Cup Monday holiday) in 2010.

Scobie notes that the annual cycle marked "a fundamental shift to a broader audience. Up until then we had absolutely loyal, rusted-on music fans who researched the program and so on. But for the broader community there was that perplexity about what it was. When it went annual more people engaged with it. People told friends and that gave it momentum.

"At the same we pushed the envelope with our audience – whether it was with programming Dirty Three on the one hand, or presenting a sound sculpture , edgy performance art activities, things you wouldn't normally expect a broader audience to be engaged in. That is because the audience come with such an openness; an intent to enjoy what is offered. They are very receptive and keen to move on to the road less travelled."

"Our audience is incredibly diverse – from teens to senior adults, there's a huge breadth. A key to the festival is its format. If you are watching an artist on stage that doesn't particular take your fancy, you have the freedom to move off and find something else.

"Strolling in the park is pleasurable. It is like a village environment. Colin Koch, one of the original organising group, who came up with the name WOMADelaide, described it as an event where you go and meet your neighbours. The social aspect is a key part. Whether you are among the 40% from interstate, or local, it is a very civilised and sociable environment and we have built on that aspect . So we have Planet Talks and the cuisine sessions, Taste to the World- ways people can engage, not just with the program, but each other."

"It is different from other festivals where headlining is almost an obsession. In the early days we were obliged to have names – Men at Work, Crowded House, more recently, Sinead O'Connor. But in the last ten years we have stopped having to deal with that question - 'Who are these people ? Never heard of them.' They take that on trust .

"We still have names - DD Dumbo is a hot favourite at the moment- but that's not the way the program is appreciated . We had the conscious thought that for the 25th anniversary we should be able to produce a program which is quintessentially a WOMAD program. The Philip Glass Ensemble's performance of *Koyaanisqatsi* marks the composer's 80th birthday (the Adelaide Festival was one of the first commissioners of his work). The Manganiyar Classroom (an Indian children's project designed to preserve the music traditions in Rajasthan) highlights the way we relate to the lives ahead of us.

"You can do very different things. The commission with Dance North, Lucy Guerin Inc and Senyawa is another, challenging our audience in new directions."

WOMADelaide has a long tradition in featuring Indigenous Australian, Torres Strait Islander, Polynesian and Melanesian cultures. In 2017 Archie Roach, who first played back in 1992, returns, while, for a first appearance Yolngu man, Gawurra celebrates Arnhem Land culture.

Other featured performers destined to find enthusiastic admirers are Argentina's tango sensation Orquesta Tipic Fernadez Fierro, Welsh folk fusion group 9Bach, South African a capella trio The Soil, and Xylouris White (Cretan lute player George Xylouris, in league with Dirty Three drummer Jim White).

As always at WOMAD, women performers hold up half the sky. From Aziza Brahim from Western Sahara/Spain to Bebel Gilberto (daughter of the legendary bossa nova singer Joao). Inna Modja, protégé of Salif Keita will perform, as will fellow Malian, Oumou Sangare. Spanish traditional singer Mercedes Peon will feature along with US favourite Toni Childs and Australians Kelly Menhennett, Caiti Baker and Nattali Rize. The program is full of promise.

Ska, blue beat, and reggae aficionados are well-served at WOMAD – this year with Monday night headliners, The Specials who will be... special. The single handed Jamaican, Brushy One String, is also not to be missed. Other bands mixing it up for the punters will be the Serbian actor, director and musician Emir Kusturica and his No Smoking Orchestra, Austrian live-wires Parov Stelar , The Warsaw Village Band, the exotic Oki Dub Ainu band from Japan and Baba ZuLa from Turkey.

I asked Ian Scobie how it feels on first night as the festival begins : "Friday is always very fraught . I worry that everything will go well, will go smoothly. I find Friday difficult. You've got 25,000 people, all those souls - anything can happen, artists getting sick and so on. But by Monday it's a mixture of exhaustion and happiness."

At WOMAD, if you see this modest character in a broad hat cycling between the various stages , it is very likely Ian Scobie – "The most pleasurable thing I find generally about the festival" he observes, " is going through the park seeing the looks on people's faces, at how much they are enjoying themselves, with friends, with their children."

And then he climbs back on his bike for next time. There is always the next time. "We have large scale things planned for 2018 already. Things on the boil, we'll have artists in town for discussions, and there are things that couldn't happen for 2017 that are waiting to be added."

WOMADelaide begins on Friday March 10 until March 13.

Posted online Daily Review, March 7, 2017.

Delving into fantasy of childhood solitude

Published: 2017-03-12 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Adelaide Festival Theatre

The Magic City Adapted from the novel by Edith Nesbit Devised by Manual Cinema Her Majesty's Theatre March 11. Tickets $25- $49 Bookings: adelaidefestival.com.au Until March 13.

This is an especially creative time for multi-media theatre. The exuberant mix of live feed video, animation, puppetry, back-projection and magnified miniatures has produced an intriguing variety of works which have tackled complex subjects once thought of as the domain only of conventional drama.

In recent Adelaide Festivals we have seen notable instances of these innovative hybrids. In 2013, the Netherlands company, Hotel Modern, presented *Kamp*, their compelling miniature reconstruction of the horrific Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. More recently, DJ Kid Koala bundled live-action puppets with a string quartet to stage his graphic novel *Nufonia Must Fall*. And last year, *Golem*, the joint venture between Theatre de Ville Paris and the Young Vic, written and directed by Suzanne Andrade, used film, actors and clay animation to present a disturbing phantasmagoria about humankind and its machines.

For 2017, the Chicago-based collective, Manual Cinema, is delighting audiences from age seven and upwards with *The Magic City*, an adaptation of Edith Nesbit's 1910 novel about childhood loneliness and compensatory fantasy. In this version, the boy in Nesbit's original is now nine year old Philomena (Sarah Fornance) who has lived securely with her adult half-sister Helen (Julia Miller) and is then faced with having to share life with Brandon (Linsey Falls) Helen's fiancé and his anxious-to-please, accident-prone, seven year old son Lucas (Jeffrey Paschal).

The story of Philomena's struggle to acknowledge that her closely bound life on the island of Phi-Helen-Ia, as she calls her safe haven with her sister, is presented on the main screen with live-feed video - homing in on the delightfully animated Fornance with her heavy spectacles, pigtails and woolly pompom hat. Then, a narrative cavalcade of overhead projections, paper shadow puppets and live action in silhouette, propels the exploration of a besieged little girl coming to terms with what she describes as her destructive Philomena-zilla fantasies, and her gradual recognition that Lucas is also a child coping with grief and abrupt life changes.

The creation, by designers Lizi Breit, Drew Dir and Julia Miller, of the Magic City, a topography made from cardboard cut-outs, miniature objects and beautifully expressive silhouette, is a triumph of theatrical flair posing as low-tech improvisation. The narration, computer-fed soundscape and vocals from Maren Celest, combine with onstage musicians, Michael Hilger on keyboards and co-composer Ben Kauffman on guitar, to envelope the visuals with an engagingly cinematic score.

This endearingly earnest production has a gentle charm and a staunch purpose, and the Manual Cinema ensemble, while busily revealing their techniques for all to see, modestly conceal their virtuosity to better serve their message.

Their second Festival presentation, *Lula Del Ray*, set in the American Southwest and featuring the music of Hank Williams and Patsy Cline, opens on Tuesday March 14 until March 16.

"Delving into fantasy of childhood solitude", *The Australian*, March 13, 2017, p.14.

Adelaide Fringe 2018

Published: 2018-02-18 *Adelaide Fringe · Theatre*

Theatre

Next Stop Romance as Edinburgh imports cut straight to the heart

Love Letters to the Public Transport System by Molly Taylor February 14. Holden Street Theatres until March 1.

Borders by Henry Naylor Gilded Balloon and Redbeard Theatre February 14. Holden Street Theatres until March 18.

Fallot Company 2 February 17. Empire Theatre, Royal Croquet Club Until February 25.

Bookings : adelaidefringe.com.au or phone 1300 621 255. Duration: each show 60 minutes.

The Adelaide Fringe has switched on. With the opening night *Parade of Light*, a series of installations illuminating North Terrace for the duration of the festival, the program of more than 1200 events has begun. The largest arts event in the Southern Hemisphere, and second only to Edinburgh, the Adelaide Fringe is an un-curated colossus which transforms the city.

The theatre program alone lists some 130 events and, again this year, Holden Street Theatres, are among the first out of the blocks with a selection of critical successes direct from Edinburgh.

Many commuters might think *Love Letters to the Public Transport System* is a cruel oxymoron. But Molly Taylor's monologue, an artful panegyric to tubes and trains and buses, is a disarmingly tender account of a private life acted out in public space. It is about love gone bung, and love – in a chance meeting at the White Horse pub – reawakened.

The course of events never does run smooth but that doesn't stop Taylor wanting to write and thank the drivers at Virgin Rail and London Transport, especially Barry Henshaw, for connecting her, Tam, Margaret and other travelling souls in the Greater London area, with the chances, coincidences, destinies and destinations that make up all our serendipitous lives. *Love Letters* is a wryly-pitched reminder that the transports of the heart can surprise us, especially when they don't run to schedule.

Borders is the fourth play in UK writer Henry Naylor's outstanding *Arabian Nightmares* series. *Echoes* and *Angel* have already performed at Holden Street in recent Fringes and this newest work deserves the acclaim it brings with it from the Edinburgh season.

Crisply directed by Michael Cabot and Louise Skaaning, *Borders* charts the progress of Sebastian (Graham O'Mara) an ambitious photojournalist who, after gaining accidental fame meeting and photographing Osama Bin Laden, abandons news for lucrative celebrity portraiture. It also presents the utterly different life of an unnamed young Syrian woman (the excellent Avital Lvova) besieged in Homs and taking revenge on her father's death by defacing images of the Assad regime with graffiti.

Naylor's alternating monologues are exhilarating in their pace and vivid detail. The description of the eventual crossing of paths - as Sebastian documents the perils of the nameless young artist's refugee boat in the Mediterranean - is both timely and thrillingly dramatised.

Unless you are a cardiologist you may not know that Tetralogy of Fallot is a congenital heart defect. Circus performer Marianna Joslin was diagnosed at the age of six and has had two major surgeries with a third still to come. *Fallot* is her story, told partly by Joslin as factual narrative but mostly using circus routines and gymnastics featuring Olivia Porter, Phoebe Armstrong, Jake Silvester and Casey Douglas.

There is a pulsing soundtrack, Porter shimmies up a scarlet drape into a wire frame shaped like an anatomical heart. The trauma of surgery and then the fragility of recovery is expressed with pathos and verve. *Fallot* is not yet fully dramatically resolved but is an intriguing idea bravely ventured – in true Fringe fashion.

Murray Bramwell

"Next stop romance as Edinburgh imports cut straight to the heart", *The Australian*, February 20, 2018, p.11.

Compelling footy drama sinks the slipper into unexamined misogyny

Published: 2018-03-01 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Adelaide Festival 2018

In the Club by Patricia Cornelius State Theatre Company Odeon Theatre, Norwood Parade, Adelaide. February 27. Tickets: $34- $76. Bookings 131 246 or adelaidefestival.com.au. Duration 90 minutes (no interval) Until March 18.

Commenting on her play *Love*, written in 2003, the prolific and fearless playwright, Patricia Cornelius observed: “Love is a given. We all believe we will feel it one day. Most of the time it is represented in a rather crass and ludicrous package, but we buy the package anyway.”

In her newest work, *In the Club*, commissioned by State Theatre for the Adelaide Festival, the package is crasser than usual because love is perilously mixed with adulation, fantasy and porn-inspired male narcissism.

Three young women begin with separate monologues. Annie (Miranda Daughtry) is young and mad on AFL footy. She goes to games, talks match strategy and is disgusted by the flirtatious girliness of her friends. She is also astonished when Sean O’Grady (Dale March), a newly recruited midfielder, gives her his phone number.

Olivia (Rachel Burke) is an arts student who doesn’t know much about boyfriends. She finds sex role-plays ludicrous and isn’t sure about love until she meets Angus (Rashidi Edward), a star player intrigued to meet someone who knows nothing about football. Ruby (Anna Steen), on the other hand, is a tough cookie who likes sex, especially with super-fit, gym-sculpted footy blokes like James (Nathan O’Keefe) now in the twilight of his career. They may be the stars but, off the field, Ruby says, it’s she who controls the game.

From there, director Geordie Brookman takes Cornelius’ confronting, timely play into a series of increasingly disturbing encounters that begin with banter and end with indifference and sexual assault.

The set and lighting, co-credited to Geoff Cobham and Chris Petridis, consists of heavy steel pillars at the sides of the stage and horizontal planks at the back which fill with intense white light. The floor is rather inexplicably covered in shallow water and periodically jets spray the stage. The players are also drenched in intense red and blue light and Andrew Howard’s soundtrack adds urgent techno pulsing and synth cascades to the mix.

In the Club, echoing David Williamson’s earlier classic, *The Club*, delivers a harsh verdict on the unexamined misogyny and unchecked abuse of the entitled towards their women fans and devotees. AFL is the target, (but other footy codes can also take a bow) and there are various references to actual scandals: sexting, revenge porn, cheating with team-mates’ wives and gang rape.

The performances are strong, although sometimes over-wrought, and the male choruses of derision toward the women could be more telling with less vocal bombast. Miranda Daughtry finds poignant precision with her portrait of Annie and Rachel Burke’s depiction of Olivia’s ordeal, which closes the play, brings Cornelius’s formally ambitious dramatic intentions to a powerful conclusion. This play bravely lifts the lid on a difficult subject just when the gender-quaking #MeToo movement is summoning its voices of resistance.

“Compelling footy drama sinks the slipper into unexamined misogyny” *The Australian*, March 1, 2018, p.15.

Daily Review - Welcoming the World

Published: 2018-03-02 *WOMADelaide · Music*

Daily Review

Welcoming the World

As WOMADelaide prepares to open the gates of Botanic Park from March 9 -12, Murray Bramwell talks with Program Manager Annette Tripodi about the 2018 program.

March is a brilliantly mad month in Adelaide. It is when the city is captured by the Festival and Writers' Week, the ever-expanding Fringe, the Clipsal 500 Supercar race, and WOMADelaide. Each event has its signatures, rituals and durable traditions – but that seems almost especially true of WOMAD.

Now in its 26th year, it has come a long way from its beginnings as part of Rob Brookman's Adelaide Festival in 1992. Borrowed from the WOMAD UK event which began in 1982, under the patronage of high profile musician, Peter Gabriel and his RealWorld record label, the Adelaide version set high standards and created enduring expectations.

It became a stand-alone event in 1993 and featured every second year until 2002 when it became an annual fixture, extending from three to four days in 2010 to take advantage of the rescheduled Adelaide Cup public holiday.

There are many reasons for WOMADelaide's popularity but perhaps the most significant is its location. Botanic Park near the Adelaide Zoo and Botanical Gardens is a prime location in the CBD, part of the heritage North Terrace precinct. Until last year, when concerts by James Taylor, Santana and Stevie Nicks were staged there, WOMAD has had exclusive use of the park since its inception.

And that was a lucky accident. Initially, in its first year, Belair National Park was to have been its location. But high temperatures and total fire bans meant WOMAD needed to be re-located. Botanic Park was made available as a venue and, with its majestic Moreton Bay figs and giant eucalypts, it has remained so.

Annette Tripodi has been connected with WOMAD for twenty years. "I was really junior when I started," she is quick to say, "I was an artist minder." But since 2009 she has been Operations and Program Manager which means, that along with WOMADelaide Director Ian Scobie, she decides on the artist lineup and on which of the eight stages they will perform. Organising this year's festival has been especially rewarding for Tripodi – "I'm always excited by the program, but this year particularly so."

The annual cycle for the festival means that securing artists is a continuous process and often, after extended discussions, arrangements fall through, or have to be postponed.

"The most stressful time is July to November . That's when the real booking happens. There's always a deluge of activity then. And we try to wrap the program by about October. So once the program's been finalised, the invitations, the contracts and the schedules are all done – it's not so there is nothing to do - but the hardest part is over with."

2018 will see some ambitious projects at WOMAD. As Tripodi observes – "A few of them have been bubbling away for a while. Anoushka Shankar is someone we have been talking with over the last three festivals. " Last seen at WOMAD in 2010 with her father, sitar virtuoso, the late Ravi Shankar, Anoushka's career, says Tripodi, "has progressed in leaps and bounds . This particular show *Land of Gold* is spellbinding. It's not your classically traditional sitar concert." *Land of Gold*, an exploration of the experience of people displaced by poverty and war, promises to be a Friday night highlight. Another high profile Indian production is *The Manganiyar Seduction*, featuring 40 musicians and its own performance stage in Frome Park, adjacent to the main WOMAD site. It features three generations of Manganiyars, a caste of musicians from the Thar Desert in Rajasthan. "We have wanted this show since it performed at the Sydney Festival in 2012," says Tripodi, "It's one of the most spectacular shows I've seen." It will play each night of the festival at 9.30pm.

Other headliners that Tripodi is especially pleased to lock in are Rodrigo y Gabriela, a Mexican acoustic guitar duo who will capture the Foundation Stage Friday audiences with their brilliantly dexterous Latin rhythms and Flamenco folk rock stylings.

On Saturday the amiably raucous Gogol Bordello will hold court. Hailing from New York City, they feature members from the Ukraine, Ecuador, Russia and Ethiopa, and will showcase their newest CD, *Seekers and Finders*. Their gypsy punk sound is reminiscent of Frank Zappa and the Mothers in their heyday – or more recently, last year's WOMAD raves, from Turkey, Baba Zula. Also to watch out for on Saturday : Violons Barbare – a trio from France, Mongolia and Bulgaria- a tuva-voiced mix of strings and percussion; and Ghanaian legends, Pat Thomas and the Kwashibu Area Band.

The Sunday headliners include Havana Meets Kingston, a supergroup of Latin and reggae stars (convened by Australian producer Mista Savona) which includes bass and drum luminaries, Sly and Robbie, and members of the Buena Vista Social Club. Admirers of the prodigiously talented saxophonist and bandleader, Kamasi Washington are eagerly anticipating his once-only WOMAD appearance. His triple disc composition, suitably named *The Epic,* is a masterpiece of contemporary jazz. And the original desert blues exponents, Tinariwen, Tuareg nomad musicians from Mali, will return to WOMAD after conquering the world stages with their rock-steady sound.

Among many auspicious acts, Thievery Corporation promise to be a Rasta electronica fusion highlight on Monday night with their hypnotic *Temple I and I* album – featuring *Thief Rockers*, the rap apocalypse of *Ghetto Matrix,* and with the ever-timely *Drop the Guns* they will have the WOMAD crowds grooving with purpose. On Stage 2 the Tao Dance Theatre from China will put the D back in the World of Music and Dance with their works *4* and *6* choreographed by Tao Ye.

WOMADelaide has always featured an impressive array of women performers and this year is no exception. Annette Tripodi enthusiastically lists some of them – Dayme Arocena from Cuba, recently feted after concerts in the UK, popster Bedouine who has just toured with Fleet Foxes in the US, Lebanese singer Ghada Shbeir, "a legend in her part of the world" interpreting classical Arabic music, Middle-Eastern folk and ancient Maronite chants, and Bulgarian singers Eva Quartet, part of the Grammy award winning choir Le Mystere des Voix Bulgares. Also from Ghana is Jojo Abot, Cape Verde singer Lura returns and Noura Mint Seymali will represent the strong matriarchal music of Mauritania.

The more introspective performance spaces – the Zoo Stage, Moreton Bay and Novatech – will again feature memorable artists. Tripodi particularly notes the Rahim Al Haj Trio, featuring the master oud player's poignant composition *Letters from Iraq*, a meditation on war - perhaps comparable to another oud composer, Anouar Brahem's extraordinary work, *Souvenance*.

Rajab Suleiman and Kithara from Zanzibar will perform, as will the splendid female folk duo, My Bubba – featuring Guobjorg, from Iceland, on guitar and My, from Sweden, playing lap harp. Their CD *Big Bad Good* is one you will want to own. Also, in the folk category and not be missed - Elephant Sessions, a Scottish quintet, featuring infectious trad-funk-jig amalgams, and the vibrant balladry of Canadian Quebec band, Le Vent du Nord.

The Australian contingent is large and impressive. Deborah Conway and Willie Zygier are listed, Dan Sultan will feature his excellent *Killer* album, Kings and Associates will sings the blues from their *Tales of a Rich Girl* release, Tex, Don and Charlie (Perkins, Walker and Owens) will sing *How Good is Life*, and the Mission Songs Project, convened by Jessie Lloyd will perform revived, almost lost, much-loved secular songs from Aboriginal communities and missions across Australia in the mid 20th century.

Spectacular site installations have always been a feature of the WOMAD experience. Last year's *Exodus of Forgotten Peoples*, a fire sculpture from French lumineers, Carabosse is a vivid example. This year, each night, Gratte Ciel (Skyscraper), also from France, will take to the canopy above the park for their aerial circus *Place des Anges.*

"Gratte Ciel are the largest and most complex site act we've ever done, " Tripodi observes , "32 performers are coming from France, there are five cranes and they will be an amazing finale to the festival. They have never done the show outside an urban environment before. 'Enchanting' is an over-used word - but it will be."

Also featuring will be Ackroyd and Harvey and their giant people portraits projected on the grass and large screens. Like Gratte Ciel, they visited WOMAD in 2017 scoping the terrain and taking photos of people in the crowd. They will now be featured each night of this year's festival.

Annette Tripodi has an especially good feeling about this year's WOMAD. It is ambitious program, it includes large companies like Manganiyar and big choirs, like Dustyevsky and Mama Kin Spender. There are some challenging logistics with more than 650 artists, but all the ducks are in a row. She has been able to include particular favourites such as Chileans - singer Nano Stern and the popular band Chico Trujillo – and the rambunctious New Orleans slam rap outfit, Tank and the Bangas. All that is left now is for the show to begin.

"It still fills me with so much joy each year" Tripodi says, "There are lots of people I have not seen perform live. There are things I really love and want to see again. Once the festival begins I am constantly on the move. I like to see how the audiences are receiving what we have brought them. When you work so hard on something you love - to just sit in your office backstage would be criminal. I get amongst it as much as possible."

Daily Review, February 26, 2018. " *WOMADelaide's Annette Tripodi has 365 days to hand pick 690 artists for the four day music fest*"

Grace Notes

Published: 2018-03-02 *Adelaide Festival · Music*

Grace Jones Elder Park Adelaide Festival February 28

Murray Bramwell

When Grace Jones takes to the stage in Elder Park - an unfashionably fashionable 45 minutes late - it is like the arrival of the Queen of Sheba at the *Dia de los Muertes*, day of the dead. She is wearing a shiny skull mask haloed with long black spikes and a body suit with thick, white skeletal markings that Keith Haring might have personally designed. But if this is some kind of *memento mori* then Ms Jones has very different plans. She's going *Nightclubbing*.

The nine piece band, including two women singers, is already primed. With whip-crack drums and indolent piano chords, Jones turns Iggy Pop's song into a statement of Stylish Intent. "We're Nightclubbing, nightclubbing /We're walking through town." With its stalking, vogueing insolent gait, the song establishes all that is to follow.

We are in a State of Grace. This is the performer who defined club chic in late 70s New York, the triple-triple threat performer, airbrushed and sculpted for album covers by controversial designer Jean-Paul Goude – those Dick Tracy shoulder pads, the topiaried crewcut hair, the sheen of her complexion. She became Paris Noir redux, an Art Deco figurine for the Temple of Disco.

But whatever Goude thought he was up to - and racial stereotyping is even more problematic nearly forty years on – Grace Jones leaves us without a shadow of doubt that she is in total charge of the Jones TM. She is an empowered woman, and is now an empowered woman of three score and ten.

She has shared that power, revelled in it, and spread it around, encouraging, enticing, inciting especially her niche audiences – people of colour in racist New York City, the gay community beset with the nightmare of AIDS. It is no wonder she is so celebrated; she is not just some lazily-labelled diva, or an icon (whatever that worn-out tag is now supposed to mean). Grace Jones is a pioneer and a cultural liberator. And she invented Lady Gaga.

After she has woven her *Nightclubbing* way around the stage and catwalk, Jones pushes back her skull mask and it sits like a tiara above her famous face. But this is a gradual reveal. Now it's the outsized dark glasses - and lip gloss you can see from King William Street.

The set gets underway with *This is* from her 2008 *Hurricane* album. "This is my voice/My weapon of choice/This is life." The lyrics are personal and characteristically defiant – "most of my crimes are of optimism/ 40 thousand volts of recognition".

Jones has always had a flair for interpreting others. Chrissie Hynde's Pretenders classic, *Private Life* is an outstanding example. Moving into a reggae rhythm the band lay a sinuous riff for Jones's sardonic narrative – "Your marriage is a tragedy/But it's not my concern. I'm very superficial I hate everything official/ Your private life drama, baby, leave me out." The song is still a classic, and this extruded, beat-heavy version is a highlight of the night.

A cluster of Jones favourites are next *I've Seen that Face Before (Libertango), Warm Leatherette* (with community singing ! before setting out tonight, who in the crowd expected to be crooning Warm, Warm Leatherette ?) and from the 1982 album, *Living My Life*, another nod to her country of origin - *My Jamaican Guy*.

Several of the newest songs in the set refer back to her early days in Spanish Town, Jamaica and the free-spirited childhood before, aged thirteen, she moved to US with her family. It was there that her father converted to Pentecostal Christianity. After his premature death, her mother re-married - to an even stricter, clergyman, Master P (whose treatment Jones later described as "serious abuse").

Physical mistreatment and excessive religious zeal shaped her attitudes and outlook on life. She later said, in 2015, "I am very militant and disciplined. Even if sometimes that means being militantly naughty and disciplined in the arts of subversion."

Her newest song *Shenanigans* celebrates that freedom : "smoke the weed/get a little higher" as does *Williams' Blood*, a meditation on family genetics and attributes. Her reply to those who ask "Why don't you be a Jones like your Sister and your brother Noel ?" – is to repeat her free-spirited refrain "I've got the Williams' blood in me."

Similarly when she sings *Amazing Grace* – prefaced by "Pray for me I am a wicked child" – her rendition is not the pious sentiment of Christian acceptance. Her experiences of the hypocrisy and cruelty of organised religion are still bruised and vivid. As a matter of plain fact, it is Beverley Grace Jones who is amazing, for getting the hell out of there.

This performance is a series of masks and revelations, facets of a complex woman who can celebrate the simple hedonism of dance pop alongside a very different kind of personal introspection. And with masks and revelations come the many costumes changes – a profusion of wigs, millinery, bowler hats and atavistic head-dresses, of scarves, capes, shawls, arm and ankle bangles, fur-tails, and, for the final cluster of greatest hits - her naked, elaborately painted, decorated skin.

The Roxy Music classic, *Love is the Drug* gets a rather hurried tempo which doesn't suit its languid self-satisfaction, but Jones is a sight to behold, in her bowler hat, standing in a vortex of coloured down spots. Then, wearing a platinum wig which hangs to her waist, Jones and Co grind their way though the raucous carnality of *Pull Up to the Bumper*. With lyrics that would make Fats Waller blush, it is Grace Jones at her mischievous, transgressive best. She rolls out a giant hula hoop while several hundred kilos of gold tinsel scraps fall from above, enveloping the entire eco-system of Elder Park.

The band, led by the excellent, electric bass guitarist Malcolm Joseph, concludes the night with an extended version of *Slave to the Rhythm*. The sound, lighting and general production, under the excellent direction of former Adelaidean, Kamal Ackarie, has been first rate.

It is long ride as Jones moves along the catwalk, gladhanding the crowd, the huge monochrome video stage images show the star triumphant and, even as her voice begins to tire, still shining. As for the audience – what can you say? We are slaves to the rhythm. And, on a cool night in March, full of festive admiration for a remarkable artist.

The Barefoot Review, March 2, 2018.

Ambitious staging brings out the dead in bright unbearable reality

Published: 2018-03-04 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Adelaide Festival

Memorial by Alice Oswald Brink Productions Dunstan Playhouse, Adelaide Festival Centre. March 2. Tickets $30 - $79. Bookings 131 246 or online. Duration: 90 minutes (no interval) Until March 6.

Alice Oswald's long poem, *Memorial,* published in 2011, is well-named. It is elegiac and unforgettable. She calls it an "excavation" and "a kind of oral cemetery." It is a list of 215 names, taken from Homer's *Iliad*, of soldiers who died in the Trojan War. With clinical precision she describes the nature of their wounds and the moment of each death. Oswald says she wanted to capture what the ancients praised in Homer's epic – its *enargeia,* its "bright unbearable reality."

Reducing the original to a grim listicle, Oswald describes her poem as a "translation of *The Iliad's* atmosphere, not its story" And in his ambitious staging for Brink Productions, director Chris Drummond has impressively accomplished this with a narrator (Helen Morse), a ten piece consort of musicians, three dancers and a stage chorus of 179 women, men and children ; almost one for each of the war dead in the poem's spellbinding roll of honour, dishonour and sudden, stark extinction.

Conducting composer Jocelyn Pook's richly evocative score, Music Director (and counter-tenor) Jonathan Peter Kenny leads a string, quartet, featuring cellist Zoe Barry, Quentin Grant on clarinet and accordion, and three distinctive women vocalists – soprano Kelly McCusker for Oswald's repeated lyric interpolations, and Belinda Sykes and Tanja Tzarovska singing keening Bulgarian and Macedonian ballads, mournful dirges in the key of Asia Minor.

The Soldier Chorus is Drummond and choreographer, Yaron Lifschitz's greatest challenge. Managing a large group, even on the expansive stage of the Dunstan Playhouse is not easy. The opening moment, when the curtain rises on Michael Hankin's elegant set with its high mezzanine for the musicians, is immediately promising. Occupying the entire stage, the chorus lie covered like grave mounds, gently bathed in Nigel Leving's always sympathetic, often beneficent, side-lighting. It is a striking image and shows the crowd tableau at its best.

As also when they move in circles like the dead in the Underworld, or in the pastoral idylls. Then, they are abundant humanity, living reminders of the now abject war dead. But when the chorus is required to "act", or the dancers begin some convulsive or decorative movement, the effect is often jarring and the meditative unity undermined.

There can be no reservations about Helen Morse's performance, however. She is magnificent. Drummond has astutely recognized the dramatic strength of the poet's text and found an outstanding actor to deliver it. Morse is pitch-perfect.

Droll, laconic, fierce, never sentimental, she effortlessly inhabits this lithe, earthy poetry, giving each line clarity, each name its sombre due. Dressed in a rough-spun mulberry red patchwork shift, she is diminutive in contrast to the chorus but compelling as the narrator, aghast at what she describes, but unflinching witness to this bright unbearable reality.

"Ambitious staging brings out the dead in bright unbearable reality" The Australian, March 5, 2018, p.14.

The Far Side of the Moon Theatre Review

Published: 2018-03-05 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Daily Review Adelaide Festival

Murray Bramwell

Lunar Tunes

The Far Side of the Moon Written and directed by Robert Lepage Ex Machina. Her Majesty's, Adelaide. March 3.

It was the Soviet Luna 3 mission in 1959 which first captured photos of the far side of the moon. They discovered mountains and dark regions which the Russians named the Sea of Moscow, the Sea of Desire and the Sea of Ingenuity.

For French Canadian theatre director, Robert Lepage, the far side of the moon is also a place where humans can't see themselves, or their planet. It calls for a completely new perspective. Maybe those seas of Desire and Ingenuity can help us find a more cosmic view of our lives.

Philippe lives in Quebec City and he is writing a PhD thesis on popular culture and the space programs of the 1960s. He is forty-ish and a perpetual student. His thesis proposals get rejected because as a philosopher he is too weird and as a scientist he is too dreamy. He is an advocate for a space elevator – a structure built from Earth that reaches for the stars. It was Konstantin Tsiolkovsky's idea in 1895, inspired by the Eiffel Tower.

Lepage's richly textured narrative re-captures the excitement of the Space Race which began with the Russian achievements – Sputnik, the first satellite, in 1957, and in 1961, the cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin, the first person to orbit the Earth. These exploits and the subsequent rivalry from the United States as part of the extra-terrestrial Cold War loom large in Philippe's imaginings. It is the cosmonauts that interest him and he's a fan of elderly Russian heroes, like Alexey Leonov, the first man to walk in space. Old black and white images of the early missions are projected large on the wide screen (doubling as a mirror) that runs the full width of the stage.

Several portholes form part of the constantly morphing set. Philippe is doing his laundry and while loading the washer he climbs in. A video feed shows him from the reverse angle and then the porthole becomes a space capsule and the mundane routines of his solitary apartment have turned into a search for the stars.

This is also a tale of two brothers. Andre, younger than Philippe and in many ways antithetical to him, is an extraverted, self-important minor celebrity - a presenter on the Weather Channel. Philippe despises his values and his gaudy success but the recent death of their mother has forced them to deal with practical matters like dismantling her tiny apartment which contains some of their childhood relics and, finding a home for Beethoven, her pet goldfish.

Many of Lepage's endearing signatures are seen at their best in this production. First performed by the director himself in 2000, it has biographical elements and, like the much more recent *887*, a tender, almost elegiac sense of distant family memory.

In an impressive solo performance, Yves Jacques wittily presents both brothers and navigates the complexities of the staging with marvellous ease. The fluid mix of newsreel, live video, puppetry, mirror illusions and remote controlled miniature moon buggies is Robert Lepage at his theatrical best. Especially when harmonised with Laurie Anderson's spacey music, Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*, excerpts from Coltrane, and the crooning *I Gaze at the Moon.* This is an original, funny, mournful, gently reflective visit to the other side of ourselves, a two hour orbit to remember.

"The Far Side of the Moon Theatre Review," *Daily Review*, March 5, 2018.

Daily Review - Adelaide Fringe 2018

Published: 2018-03-08 *Adelaide Fringe · Theatre*

Adelaide Fringe

Murray Bramwell

That Daring Australian Girl

Written and performed by Joanne Hartstone

Holden Street Theatres

March 6. Until March 18.

Muriel Matters, the Adelaide-born suffragette, her name itself a slogan, was a most remarkable woman. Her progress from Parkside High School and the Music Conservatorium of the University of Adelaide to the performance stages and, even more dramatically, the political arenas of London, is fascinating to follow. Writer and performer, Joanne Hartstone knows this only too well and her monologue, celebrating the young woman referred to in the international press as "That Daring Australian Girl", is a winning tribute.

Dressed (by Nikki Fort) in the Edwardian garb of the day – demure blouse, long skirt and scarf-tethered millinery - Hartstone presents a woman with intelligence, determination and a gift for the performative. Her early life in Australia is crisply described- her training in music and elocution in her home town, touring with the Robert Brough theatre company from Sydney, moving to Perth and then momentously, in 1905 at the age of 28, getting together 19 quid to buy her passage to London.

Working not only as a performer in London, she added journalism to her skills and interviewed the playwright of the hour, George Bernard Shaw. Matters was well familiar with current trends in theatre. Like so many, she had read and been profoundly affected by Ibsen's *The Doll's House.* But it was a meeting with the émigré Russian anarchist, Prince Peter Kropotkin that proved significant when he challenged her to consider that the purpose of art is not individual success but to reveal a wider truth. It was then, like an apostle of activism, she vowed to dedicate her talents to the Women's Freedom League.

Joanna Hartstone, with well-judged direction from Nicholas Collett (and nicely understated period set design by Tom Kitney) presents her protagonist as a silent film heroine – complete with projected white-on-black captions incorporating press quotes and chapter titles – *The Prisoner*, *The Balloon*.

And it is that kind of history. Matters arrived in London, convinced – as a citizen of South Australia where universal suffrage had been law since 1894 – that votes for women was a dead cert inevitability. This buoyed her throughout – when padlocking herself to the grille in the Ladies' Gallery in the House of Commons, serving more than thirty days hard labour in Holloway Prison, and intrepidly hiring a dirigible air balloon (emblazoned with Votes or Women on one side) to shower 25 kilos of leaflets on the people of London, since it was unlawful to distribute them at street level.

With her brisk, cheery, almost Mary Poppins-perfect elocution, Joanne Hartstone gives a rich portrait of a woman with a sense of purpose and a shrewd activism. She also presents Matters's complicated private life – her deep friendship with "Tilly", fellow suffragette, Violet Tillard, and her elusive dealings with two fiancés.

It is a bigger-than-life biography, of undaunted accomplishments, exuberantly and entertainingly celebrated. *That Daring Australian Girl* is heading to Edinburgh later in the year. Let's hope, unlike Muriel herself, she spends some extended time in Australian theatres as well.

Five Stars.

The Origin of Species: John Hinton's Scientrilogy

Written and performed by John Hinton

Holden Street Theatres.

March 6. Until March 18.

The Origin of Species, is also a bio-drama. In fact, a bio*logy* drama, which takes comic liberties with its subject - the founder of Evolutionary science, the 19th century naturalist, Charles Darwin - but to admirably serious purpose.

John Hinton is a livewire from the UK and his Darwin, complete with long signature beard, is a mix of fascinating detail and comic anachronism. His Victorian education is solemnly listed – Shrewsbury Grammar, where he studies Latin and acoustic guitar. This is, of course, a cue for one of many of Hinton musical interludes which amusingly pile on both information and extruded, sometimes excruciating, wordplay.

With plenty of banter with the audience, the amiably personable Hinton describes Darwin's intellectual wanderings – into medicine, then theology, never quite finding his niche. It was the encouragement, at Cambridge, from John Stevens Henslow which steered our hero scientist into the worlds of botany and zoology.

With frenzied comedy, Hinton describes Darwin (and the epoch's) fascination with specimen collection and taxonomy. Darwin's beetles, barnacles and spiders are all copious items on the agenda.

Hinton also cleverly dramatises the race for discovery, or rather to claim the notion, of natural selection. In 1858 Darwin's friend, Alfred Russel Wallace was proposing very similar ideas and they were subsequently identified as joint authors in Darwin's paradigm-shifting classic *On the Origin of Species* in 1859.

Hinton's account of the Voyage of the Beagle is filled with wonderful nerdy detail. Darwin's bitter disagreements with the mariner, Captain Fitzroy, his key discovery of Charles Lyell's crucial work on geological time, the bountiful evidence of species adaptation in the Galapagos Islands, are described with zany embellishment. Including audience participation. To demonstrate the significance of Darwin's discovery of thirteen different species of finch, the audience is summoned to its feet to act out the salient details.

Hinton's songs, a hyper-manic blend of Gilbert and Sullivan and Eric Idle, propel the proceedings towards the recognition that even humans are part of this evolutionary morphosis – and another group hootenanny emerges: "Don't be shy mates/ I'm a primate/and I'm proud."

John Hinton's entire *Scientrilogy* is not to be missed. His Einstein show, *Relativitively Speaking* is rich in protons and irony (and has the best songs.) *The Element in the Room*, his startling account of Marie Curie and radium (both miracle and scientific catastrophe) is also outstanding. John Hinton is a treat. He is charmingly funny and you learn stuff.

Four and a Half stars

Rouge

Highwire Events

The Octagon, Gluttony

Until March 18.

And now for something completely Red. *Rouge*, from Highwire the people who brought us *Papillon*, has a new bag of tricks, acrobatics and an opera soprano in a very red frock. Singer Isabel Hertaeg opens with vintage Doris Day – "If you really love me say/But if you don't dear, confess/ And please don't tell me /Perhaps, Perhaps, Perhaps." Acrobats Annalise Moore, Chris Carlos and Paul Westbrook perform a range of handstands and flips followed by Westbrook's return with ostrich feathers and a fanfare from *Big Spender*.

A larger-than-human martini glass is duly served for an esoteric line in foot juggling as Tara Silcock spins a series of brollies to the enthusiastic blast of Rihanna's *You Can Stand Under My Umbrella* "...ella,ella,eh,eh,eh". Chris Carlos returns with chairs and with some stacking and ballast assistance from an audience member, cantilevers them perilously and proceeds to stand expertly balanced on top of four of them.

Wearing only a lampshade, Tara Silcock returns for a sort of daffy Man Ray version of Norah Jones's (Come on home and) *Turn Me On.* Annalise Moore, Andre Augustus and Chris Carlos are back for some clever hand jumps to be supplanted by coloured lit hoops from Silcock and a round of hooping from Westbrook.

Rouge is slick, fast and full of thrills. Carlos chews fire sticks and spins them disconcertingly close to his very flammable skin. There is whip-cracking discipline from Silcock, breakdancing, a full-throated operatic aria to tickle the fancy and an impressive finale of triple headstands to keep us on edge. Neatly directed for pace and variety by Elena Kirschbaum, *Rouge* is a louche blend of risk and risqué.

Four Stars.

Murray Bramwell is an Adelaide-based reviewer.

Visit murraybramwell.com

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Shakespeare’s war room in theatrical overdrive

Published: 2018-03-12 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Adelaide Festival

Kings of War by William Shakespeare Adaptation by Bart Van den Eyde , Peter Van Kraaij. Translated by Rob Klinkenberg. Directed by Ivo van Hove. Toneelgroep Amsterdam. Festival Theatre, Adelaide March 10. Tickets $30 -$129. Bookings : 131 246 or online. Duration : 4 hours 30 mins (30 min interval) English surtitles. Until March 13.

It is four years since Toneelgroep Amsterdam amazed Adelaide Festival audiences with their dazzling Shakespearean triptych *Roman Tragedies*, a six hour spectacle using live video feed to present *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus* as breaking news. This year, *Kings of War*, an audacious mash-up of the Wars of the Roses histories, is again a Festival coup and an unforgettable highlight.

Scenographer and lighting designer, Jan Versweyveld has created a War Room for the first two sections, *Henry V* and *Henry VI*. Unlike the hi-tech TV studios of *Roman Tragedies,* here is a retro mix of military maps, operations telephones and data screens. The set is spacious, ravishingly lit, and features a large video screen for close-ups and links to the action in anterooms, and the harrowing morgue-like corridors of torture and execution.

The music, composed by Eric Sleichem, is performed by counter-tenor, Steve Dugardin, and trombone quartet, BLINDMAN. Along with the ominous use of metronomes in *Richard III*, it is key to the production’s success.

Director Ivo van Hove presents three contrasting versions of kingship. Henry V (Ramsey Nasr) is the just king, mindful of the grief of war, honourable to his enemies. Henry VI (Eelco Smits) is the reluctant monarch, dominated by powerful courtiers, abject in failure. After interval, when the production moves into theatrical overdrive, he is personally despatched at the suffocating hands of the psychopath king, Richard III (Hans Kesting) who even mocks his corpse by putting his nerdy glasses back on upside down.

There are too many player highlights to include here, but the cast of fourteen is outstanding. Janni Goslinga is haunting as the prophesying Margareta, ferocious queen to the timorous Henry VI, Helene Devos is excellent in the macabre courting scene with the viperous Duke of York and, insouciantly smoking a cigarette, Bart Slegers, as Edward, wordlessly wrests power from Henry VI as if it were a board room takeover.

Of the kings, Nasr, guided by the subdued rhetoric of the adaptation, captures the humanity of Henry V with less of the jingoism of many UK versions. As Henry VI, Smits, perhaps predestined by the text and direction, is haplessly one-dimensional until the final court scene.

The momentum fully develops in the second half with Hans Kesting’s extraordinary Richard. Disfigured with a port-wine birthmark, he stares into a full-length mirror with fascinated disbelief, delivering all of Shakespeare’s “Winter of discontent” soliloquy.

Kesting is tall and moves with slow, lethal stealth. No exaggerated hunchback and limping here. And no Richard ever called for a horse like this before. It is a brilliant performance in yet another exhilarating van Hove production.

“Shakespeare’s war room in theatrical overdrive”, *The Australian*, March 12, 2018, p.15.

Adelaide Festival - Daily Review

Published: 2018-03-16 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Adelaide Festival Daily Review

Palestinian Voices

Azza Written and directed by Amir Nizar Zuabi. ShiberHur Theatre Company. Space Theatre, Adelaide Festival Centre March 14. 60 minutes, no interval. Until March 18.

The Azza is the Palestinian mourning ceremony but, in the ShiberHur Theatre Company's excellent production, it is very far from doleful. Invigorated by Amir Nizar Zuabi's warm, well-judged text, *Azza* is, as funeral organisers like to say, a celebration of life.

Azza is a gathering of men. It consists of prayers, singing, reminiscence, tears and fond laughter. The mourners rise to greet newcomers, it is a constant cycle of comfort and affirmation. Directed by the writer, this production deftly captures both the ritual and spontaneity of the event – and the bursts of volatility.

"My father died yesterday", the chief mourner, (Amer Hlehel) his dutiful stay-at-home son announces. A wave of God-have-mercy prayers and chants follow and all six performers touch their hearts, as they will do many times over the hour. They are seated on white stackable plastic chairs that are fluidly arranged and re-arranged giving a constant visual rhythm to the proceedings.

But the real energy comes from the vibrancy of the storytelling as anecdotes are shared about one man's life. His attempt at courtship of his young wife is turned into farce when he is chased into a river by her brothers' dogs and he is forced to run naked and muddy through the village. At the age of seven he is walking a donkey which escapes his grasp and, in a moment of Munchausen re-telling, the story becomes a tall one as the donkey somehow launches itself from a terrace into the top of a tree. The narrative then shifts sharply and grimly as the previously hilarious attempts to dislodge the poor animal go (to coin a phrase) horribly wrong.

We get an accumulating portrait of the deceased as a feckless, somewhat delusional man whose father sends him to Italy to study medicine only to fail seven years in a row because he hasn't learnt Italian. His exploits in the construction business wildly fluctuate. On one occasion he proudly returns to his village in a Cadillac Eldorado, in the next breath he is declared bankrupt.

Two threads run through this excellent piece. One is the death figure (intriguingly played by Khalifa Natour) who at intervals beckons the mourners to follow him into the underground, a reminder to all present that an azza itself is a meditation on our own mortality.

The other is the unresolved enmity between two brothers. One, who stayed and helped a turbulent, difficult father run the family business, and then supported him in decline and death. The other, who sought success and wealth in another country and returns, too late, and is resented for his freedom from duty.

Amer Hlehel is excellent as the constant son. Like an exasperated Uncle Vanya, he is comically unreasonable, self-pitying and justified, all at the same time. His anger roils over the four days of the azza and the eruption with his worldly sibling (Henry Andrawes) is yet another facet of this portrait of a family that rings universally true. *Azza* is an ensemble success, memorably rich in detail and in its understated way, unexpectedly consoling.

(4 and a Half Stars)

Taha Written and performed by Amer Hlehel Space Theatre, Adelaide Festival Centre March 15. 75 minutes, no interval. Until March 18.

Taha is in every way a companion piece to *Azza*. This exuberant monologue about the extraordinary life of the Palestinian poet Taha Muhammad Ali, is also expertly directed by Amir Nizar Zuabi, and features Amer Hlehel as both actor and writer.

Taha's story is that of the displacement and continuing suffering of Palestine. Born in 1931 he fled to Lebanon in 1948 when his village was heavily bombed during the Arab-Israeli war. Unlike many who stayed in camps in Lebanon (including his beloved fiancé Amira) Taha, at his father's insistence, returns to his homeland, to Nazareth, where he lived until his death in 2011.

Amer Hlehel's play fully encompasses the geopolitics of his country, but the central theme is one of resilience and unshakable optimism. There is a sensuous joy in his larger-than-life character. As in *Azza,* the writing is sometimes fabulist, it is shaping a legend. But the particulars are familiar, everyday details. Taha is a true poet. Tastes, smells, sounds envelope him like blessings. Every moment is savoured, every obstacle and grief is countenanced and somehow overcome.

Taha's story is filled with portents and providential surprise. I shouldn't be alive, he says, as he recounts his parents' desolation at the number of infant brothers, all named Taha, who died before he was born. He was the lucky fourth (or maybe fifth, I lost count).

And while Taha became a significant and much-loved poet in his country, from the age of six or seven onwards he was actually a merchant. First, selling eggs in the nearby city of Haifa (his first glimpse of the glories of the larger world), then setting up shops and expanding them. Even when he loses everything when forced to flee his village to the refugee camp, he enterprisingly makes a living for himself – and far more importantly, his family, since his disabled father cannot earn enough.

The story of his lost sheep, later returned by an honest shepherd, is one of many in this captivating play which resemble parables. Certainly it conjures a world of kindness and possibility, even in extreme duress.

Anchored by his own excellent text, Amer Hlehel is splendid as Taha. He is funny, earnest, perceptive and irrepressible. In the closing highlight to the performance, Taha, finally a recognised poet at the age of 52, reads his famous poem *Revenge*. It is remarkable. Experience it yourself : the poet himself reads it on YouTube.

Amer Hlehel has powerfully introduced to us, as has the ShiberHur Theatre Company, voices and experiences of a world that is too often reduced to headlines and generalisations.

Five Stars

Published online Daily Review, March 16, 2018.

Outstanding crop of creativity

Published: 2019-02-19 *Adelaide Fringe · Theatre*

Adelaide Fringe

Outstanding crop of creativity

Build a Rocket by Christopher York Stephen Joseph Theatre and Tara Finney Productions February 13 Holden Street Theatres until March 17

Games by Henry Naylor Gilded Balloon and Redbeard Theatre February 13. Holden Street Theatres until March 16.

Extinguished Things by Molly Taylor February 13. Holden Street Theatres until March 3. Bookings : adelaidefringe.com.au or phone 1300 621 255. Duration: each show 60 minutes.

With Friday night's Street Party and Yabarra : the Gathering of Light spectacular along the River Torrens, the Adelaide Fringe is officially switched on. Bigger than ever - 517 venues, 1326 events featuring 7000 artists, including 340 comedy acts and 156 theatre listings.

For ten years now, Martha Lott, director and producer from Adelaide's Holden Street Theatres, has been selecting and sponsoring some of the best Fringe theatre to be found. Gathered annually from the Edinburgh Festival and added to her excellent local program, this year's crop is not only fresh, it is outstanding.

Build a Rocket, the debut play from UK playwright Christopher York, is set in the northern coastal town of Scarborough. Yasmin is a sixteen year old schoolgirl running off the rails. Neglected by her alcoholic mother and smitten with local DJ Danny, she finds herself pregnant, alone and unsupported. When Yasmin decides to keep the baby, a frazzled counsellor's unlikely challenge to "raise someone amazing" triggers her determination.

Directed by Paul Robinson, Serena Manteghi gives a solo, rocket-fuelled performance as Yasmin. Defiant, exhilarated, furious, and proudly devoted to Jack, her growing child, Manteghi presents a young woman dealing with real impediments.

Her fitness as a parent is questioned and things often come unstuck, but York's text is optimistically buoyant. Yasmin is building a rocket and Manteghi's unrelenting energy and good humour makes it fly against the odds.

Games, by the prolific Henry Naylor, continues his themes of exceptional women in moments of history. Drawing on the actual events leading up to the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, it portrays Helene Mayer, a champion fencer determined to stand outside the politics of Nazi anti-Semitism, and Gretel Bergmann, a Jewish athlete wanting to win to discredit Aryan notions of a master race .

With crisp direction from Louise Skaaning, Sophie Shad and Tessie Orange-Turner are excellent as Mayer and Bergmann, and Naylor shows once again how well he navigates dialectical narrative with clarity and dramatic appeal. *Games* is a winner and a timely lesson in history.

Also returning to Holden Street is Molly Taylor. Last years's *Love Letter to the Public Transport System* was a delight, but her latest *Extinguished Things* is even more accomplished. Returning to her neighbours' empty house in her hometown in Liverpool, she recalls the life and times of Evie and Alton, a childless couple who befriended her as a teenager.

It is a subtly complex piece, encompassing social change, race, culture, and the extraordinary in the everyday. As both writer and performer, Taylor pitches it splendidly. The modest, but uniquely precious, traces of two extinguished lives are honoured in this tender elegy. It is a Fringe highlight.

Murray Bramwell

Published as "Outstanding crop of creativity", *The Australian*, February 20, 2019, p.16.

Daily Review - Adelaide Fringe 2019

Published: 2019-02-20 *Adelaide Fringe · Theatre*

Michael Griffiths - By Request

Michael Griffiths Le Cascadeur Garden of Unearthly Delights February 15 – 24. 60 mins.

Michael Griffiths – By Request is fun for the asking. Performing for a short season in Le Cascadeur before moving on to another show with Carlotta, and then back to GC duetting with Amelia Ryan for the Newton-John and Allen tribute, *Livvy and Pete* , Griffiths is having a busy Fringe.

And it is not surprising. He is a very winning performer, versatile, funny, and loaded with talent. *By Request*, by his own admission is a more free-form event where he plays favourite tunes, does audience requests and reminisces about his now twenty year career. Griffiths talks about his adventures in Australian music theatre – beginning in Adelaide and then in *Shout, Priscilla, Queen of the Desert,* and the Cole Porter tribute show which took him to Broadway. He's a droll commentator about himself and work – and modestly omits to mention that he took out the Best Cabaret Performer Helpmann Award in 2016.

He opens the set with Barry Manilow's *Copacabana (At the Copa*) reminding us in the delivery what a well-constructed song it is. And, he drolly notes that the story of Lola's declining fortunes in cabaret is "a cautionary tale for performers !" Accompanying himself on electric keyboards with support drum and bass back-up from "Josh and Felicity" Griffiths is enjoying the loose format and the immediacy of the venue. On preview night he's still adjusting to the technical set-up and performing - as he drily notes - "in a tent". But that only adds to the spontaneity. He has the all-ages crowd swaying on the bleachers as he belts out ABBA's *Knowing Me, Knowing You* – delegating vocal call and response to the front rows but jealously guarding for himself what he calls the Agnetha bits. A brisk take of *Take on Me,* the hit from Norwegian pop-synth 80s band, A-ha, is enthusiastically taken up by sections of the audience – praised for soaring with the Morten Harket high notes.

Griffiths switches genre with *Crazy Little Thing Called Love*, the Elvis Presley or Queen hit (depending when you came out of the egg). That was a request for Colleen. But not a jukebox called-out from-the-crowd request, a prior on-line, via Facebook arrangement.

Borrowing sunglasses to deal with the last of the Adelaide sun streaming into the tent, Griffiths takes time for some fan gossip about Elton John and an assured reading of *Your Song*. He makes it look easy to flip from Elton John to Credence Clearwater Revival (*Proud Mary*- requested by Peter) and then a very zippy version of *Can You Forgive Me ?* (for Tracy). Less stage production razzmatazz than the Pet Shop Boys perhaps, but very acceptable all the same.

Earlier in the show Griffiths had referred to a request from someone named Banjo the Wicked. Now it's the time for the Peter Allen number. Not *Tenterfield Saddler*, Griffiths apologises – and adds smoothly : go to the *Livvy and Pete* show for that one. Is Banjo the Wicked in the audience ? he enquires. He's our dog, a woman calls out from the back. For Banjo he sang *Don't Cry Out Loud* – and the audience swooned.

Then some Kylie *Locomotion* to speed things up. But, since Griffiths had been having too much fun conspiring with the crowd, no time for a Cole Porter number. *Love is in the Air* to finish – with a touch of JPY and a great deal of Michael Griffiths élan. Who knows what happens on other nights. Does Banjo the Wicked get to make any more requests ? There are a few nights still to go. It's well worth going to find out .

Four Stars ****

Finale Analog the company The Peacock, Gluttony Until March 16.

Berlin-based company Analog began making their gritty, no frills brand of circus in 2013 and in many ways they are reminiscent of the punk pranking in the early days of Australian companies such as Circus Oz and Rock and Roll Circus.

Led by founder Florian Zumkehr, Analog as their retro name suggests, have an "express aim of removing all artifice." They are (to quote from their company statement) "characterised by authenticity, high technical ability and direct interaction with the audience… Entirely raw and naïve."

On first night at The Peacock in the Gluttony precinct in Rymill Park, Analog opens with Zumkehr (Flo), in a scruffy Beckettian coat, clowning about with funnyman acrobat, Richie Maguire and doing some precarious balancing on a plank perched on a chair. Lucas Thielecke has also arrived on stage beating a tin drum -before setting himself up for the night behind the drum kit he expertly drills in skilful unison with the live action.

Swedish performer Manda Rydman performs her aerial ring routine with panache, as Flo plays a slow drone electric guitar and a piano track is looped in. By now, singer and sometimes-compere Eva Wild, the mysterious diva in an enormous floppy hat, begins to vocalise in response to the spinning aerialist. There is a smoke machine and pulsing lights, the effect is improvisational, spontaneous and whipcrack precise at the same time.

Attention shifts to some stacks of books on top of which Zumkehr places a chair for more gymnastics, followed by a one- armed handstand on a tower of hardbacks that threaten imminent collapse.

Maguire comes back to introduce a new craze that he says will replace Planking. He calls it Van Damming, and it involves him being hoisted in the air with one foot on the rigging and the other stretched as near to full splits as is physically credible.

Demonstrating his skill on the thick hoop-like cyr wheel, Ole Lehmkuhl oscillates and spins until he is bouncing cruciform against the stage and up again while Eva Wild, in one of many costume changes, this time into a be-jewelled jacket, sings sultry jazz riffs and the other performers line up behind the drums like back-up vocals in a recording session.

The show is called *Finale* because the company want every segment to have the intensity of a big closing finish – and it delivers on the promise. Bertan Canbeldek's impressive juggling act, using iridescent orange balls bounced on a glass platform with a mic under it to amplify the sound, is in tight sync with Lehmkuhl's drumming. It is hypnotic to hear and behold. Pole specialist , Carlos Zaspel's gravity-defying descents while Eva Wild croons through a loud hailer are another audience winner.

Analog keep amping things up. The hoop diving section is fast and furious with Maguire especially intrepid. The music pounds, the lighting richochets through the stage fog and this lively crew of performers round off their show with a cascade of glitter and confetti and an exhilarated ensemble farewell bow. The *Finale* finale is yet another highpoint. The raucous audience response says it all.

Four Stars ****

Circus Abyssinia : Ethiopian Dreams The Peacock, Gluttony Until March 17.

Circus Abyssinia has an intriguing history. It was founded by two brothers Bibi and Bichu, who had high ambitions to join a circus. But in Ethiopia, their home country, such opportunities did not exist. Discovering their love for juggling, they developed their skills as street performers in their home town, Jimma.

By 1998 they were part of a touring company visiting the Brighton Fringe. They returned to live in the UK the following year, training at the National Centre for Circus Arts where they met their mentor Sean Gandini, founder of Gandini Juggling, whose brilliantly weird Pina Bausch tribute show, *Smashed* amazed audiences at the Adelaide Fringe four years ago.

Much has happened for these enterprising men. They continued their connection with Gandini and became regulars on the festival performing circuit. Since 2010 they have also sponsored Wingate Circus school back in Addis Ababa and the project has culminated in the formation, in 2017, of Circus Abyssinia which made its debut in London and followed with a sold-out season in Edinburgh.

2019 sees Circus Abyssinia return to Adelaide for a second time and this year's show is brim with energy, verve and astonishing skill. Opening with the company's creation story - two young jugglers representing Bibi and Bichu dream of joining the circus, the stage is soon filled with acrobats in brightly coloured patterned costumes setting up for a series of hand vaulting routines. Except the word routine does not describe the dexterity and confidence of this troupe as they backflip on each other's shoulders, or pressed hands from which they are catapulted to the next pair of handlers. It is dazzling to watch the momentum – as the bass-heavy Afrobeat music and the rich tinted lighting completes the experience.

Two young women in snake-like body stockings then begin a series of contortionist displays of ever- increasing complexity and they literally turn themselves inside out, balancing on each other and redefining the meaning of the word supple. Male acrobats return with a series of skipping tricks which multiply in what seems like infinite permutations as the display progresses.

Many of the classic high performance circus turns are included here. The Chinese Pole work – twin poles, with six and then eight acrobats, astounding in their speed and intricacy . Four women spin woven discs on their fingertips and toes in a balletic balancing display. A brilliant hoop dancer adds increasing numbers of rings to her demonstration of perpetual motion, until she is swathed in hoops almost too heavy to keep spinning.

The men return with floor mats and a hoop diving routine consisting of two lots of triple hoops on top of each other through which they swoop and weave with alarming precision.

Bibi and Bichu perform their extraordinary juggling duet, moving the spinning skittles between and around and above each other with mesmeric aplomb. As with all of the stunts the degree of difficulty is wound up to around eleven.

And perhaps most unforgettable are the women contortionists, returning to out-boggle us as they manoeuvre their re-threaded limbs on to a tubular frame which enables them to balance in a way that is too improbable to explain. This is extraordinary, irresistible circus.

Five Stars *****

Published online Daily Review, 20 February 2019.

Daily Review - Planet Music

Published: 2019-02-28 *WOMADelaide · Theatre · Music*

Daily Review Planet Music WOMADelaide 2019

WOMADelaide : Adelaide's leading music festival opens on March 8 for three days and four nights. Program Manager Annette Tripodi talks with Murray Bramwell about this year's line-up.

It is a fact of life for annual festivals that no sooner has one taken its final curtain than next year's model, not only begins, but is well under way. Scoping out and signing performers from across the world is a continuing task and subject to that mix of luck, serendipity and patient slog that any programmer knows about.

"It's a rolling thing," says Operations and Program Manager Annette Tripodi. She has been associated with the festival for 21 years and has held her current position since 2009. Together with WOMADelaide director Ian Scobie, it is Tripodi's task to piece together the final list of artists and shape the event by deciding where, and on what night, they perform.

"Interestingly," Tripodi ventures, "this has been a difficult year compared to previous ones. And talking to other festival programmers, and also promoters and tour managers - across the board, they are saying it's been harder at times to secure the artists we wanted. For money reasons, availability, all kinds of complexities. I thought it was just us, but talking to others like the Perth Festival...it's been tricky this year.

"You have big dreams, and some acts we approached many times but the financial reality is that if there are 15 to 20 people travelling the offer has to be really substantial to cover the cost of all those flights. Instead they might be attracted to the US for example. But, even though we have had a few frustrations this year, given we have 75 groups from 40 countries in our program, you just can't have everyone you want !"

But as always, some things were in the process early. The Silk Road Ensemble, for instance. Founded in 1998 by the renowned cellist Yo Yo Ma, this multicultural music project has commissioned over 70 new chamber works. Incorporating instruments from the Silk Road region such as the Chinese plucked lute, the Armenian woodwind duduk, as well as Japanese and Mongolian instruments, the ensemble has a shifting personnel drawn from 59 players.

"They are really excited about coming," Tripodi notes. "They are a classical music group who are really unfamiliar with outdoor festivals. Ian Scobie has been dealing with them for two or three years and we finally have them. It will be a novelty for them to play in a park."

Another early signing was Angelique Kidjo.

"We had her here in 2016 – with Philip Glass and others - so we weren't looking to have her back so soon. But then she released her unbelievable *Remain in Light* album and this idea got wings. She's such a dynamo and she had such a good time at the festival last time, taking part in the Taste the World cookery program and other activities.

"The more we heard about the *Remain in Light* project around May last year, the more convinced we were to try. There was a quick conversation and agreement, and since then the CD and great live performances have gained acclaim and awards. Her version of those Talking Heads songs – I thought: ' this is perfect, the synchronicity is perfect.' She will play on Sunday night (9pm Foundation Stage) with a great band."

Also returning to Womad this year are Australian favourites, the John Butler Trio, who have been touring extensively in the US and Europe with their excellent recent album *Home*. Italian band Canzoniere Grecanico Salentino, or CGS for short, are also back after four years, this time showcasing their 2017 release, simply named *Canzoniere*.

"They were a wonderful success before," Tripodi recalls," They're just so authentic and energetic and they have this fabulous capacity to take the traditional, and twisting it a bit, without it becoming the kind of fusion that is off-putting to people who like that traditional sound."

Then there are the new bands that Annette Tripodi is especially keen to have on this year's listing.

"French group Christine and the Queens are a coup as far as I am concerned. She's become huge in Europe and a lot of her reputation is based on the sheer excellence of her live shows. She is as much a dancer as a singer – and she performs with dancers. They have great lighting and special FX ; there are 23 people in the show. She will be fantastic on opening night (10.20 pm Foundation Stage) A lot of people are already into Chris, but also there are many who haven't heard her. It will be a big event.

"But my favourite selection," Tripodi confides, "and it's a big call because there are a lot of great bands, is BCUC from South Africa.

I'd never heard of them until July last year. They were going to play at Womad UK and some people in Paris said to me listen to the album. But it's not even about the album – three tracks each lasting 15 minutes – it was the live show. I was transfixed from five seconds in. They bring this positive power to the stage.

"They say it is music by the people and for the people and want to show a side of South Africa and Soweto which is about positive change, tolerance, unity and community. It is never insipid, it is vibrant. This is the new generation who come from the townships bringing creativity and ingenuity in contrast to the difficulties of those communities. The seven musicians in BCUC (short for Bantu Continua Uhuru Consciousness) are only playing in Adelaide. And in true Womad style : you've never heard of them but you'll become a convert."

One enduring and very welcome feature of WOMADelaide is the preponderance of women performers. "We don't have quotas, " says Tripodi, "but when we did an analysis 70% of groups either had female leads or women band members."

"It is a delight to have Christine and Angelique and Malian star Fatoumata Diawara." Her 2018 album *Fenfo* brings a range of sounds from signature African styles to blues and funk. Another name which comes up is UK singer Gwenno, whose intriguing album *Le Kov* features other-worldly feathery vocals in both Cornish and Welsh. She plays two sets: one at the newly established Frome Park Pavilion on Friday night, the other at the Moreton Bay stage at 5 pm on Saturday.

Gamilaraay woman and Triple J favourite, Thelma Plum will play one show on Sunday, as will NSW singer-songwriter Julia Jacklin, drawing from her debut album, *Don't Let the Kids Win*. US singer Liz Phair, best known for her 1993 album *Exile in Guyville*, will reconnect on Saturday night with her indie fans and find a new audience with her bright guitar sound and her forthright, still timely songs.

Womad has seen some outstanding West African kora players, including the great virtuoso of this 21-stringed harp, Toumani Diabate. This time, Gambian woman, Sona Jobarteh, breaks the 700 year gender barrier to become the first professional female performer to come from a West African Griot (hereditary musician) family. Winner of the coveted Africa Festival Artist of the Year award in 2018, she will perform twice in Adelaide.

Other notable women included in the line-up are Irish accordionist Sharon Shannon, returning with her excellent band; and rapper singer and flautist , La Dame Blanche, daughter of Jesus Raos, director of the Buena Vista Social Club. She left Havana for Paris and has boldly re-invented herself outside the Cuban music scene.

Another of Tripodi's favourite choices is Dona Onete from Brazil. Her remarkable musical success began at the age of 73 when she signed her first recording contract in 2014. Her music (a version of *Carimbo*, a mix of Brazilian, African and Caribbean sounds) has not only made her a revered figure in her home country but has, in Tripodi's words - "conquered Europe in the past five years. She played to 10,000 plus audiences at Rosskilde Festival in Denmark. She's a tiny figure and with her young dynamic band she gave her performance seated on her throne !"

Included also in the headliners is the celebrated sarod player Amjad Ali Khan, performing as a trio with his sons Amaan and Ayaan, and accompanied on opening night by members of the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra.

On Saturday night, New Zealand's powerhouse band, Fat Freddy's Drop, returning Womad favourites, will bring their brilliant jazz-funk-reggae-electronica-soul sound to the Foundation Stage. Their 2015 album *Bays* is their best yet – and so will be this year's performance. On closing night, topping the Monday bill, are The Original Gypsies – founder members of the 1980s phenomenon, The Gypsy Kings – with a 12 piece band including eight guitars, creating a wall of rumba and flamenco.

The late night Novatech stage will be a compulsory destination for electronica and house fans again this year. DJ Harvey features on opening night – Tripodi calls him the DJs' DJ – "He's quite the English character, traversing all genres from house to soul. I can't wait to meet him. He's a cheeky soul – and daring." Other DJs include Leftfield, also from the UK, Palestinian electronica wiz DJ Sama (she is also a music producer and sound designer), and New York City pioneer DJ, Danny Krivit whose career began in underground clubs in 1971. Known as the King of Re-edit for his scratch mixing skills, he has producer credits on more than 300 records.

Also worth catching, at the Frome Park Pavilion, is Lord Echo (also from NZ) featuring his 2017 *Harmonies* album with a six-piece band. And on another note, don't miss the wittily named two-piece, DuOud, featuring Jean-Pierre Smadja (AKA Smadj) and Mehdi Haddab (from Speed Caravan – previous Womad faves with their Bo Diddley desert electric blues) mixing classical oud sounds with beats, grooves and other aural paraphernalia.

Often the most memorable Womad experiences are meditative sets on the smaller Zoo and Moreton Bay stages. This year, the two sets from Polish jazz harpist Alina Bzhezhinska and her quartet are a must. Influenced by Alice and John Coltrane and highly acclaimed on the UK circuit, this will be an all-too rare opportunity to hear jazz at Womad. Also at Moreton Bay will be the intriguing Estonian duo, Maarja Nuut and Ruum, and on Sunday night at Stage 2, the Moroccan guembri (3-stringed lute) maestro Maalem Hamid El Kasri.

Womadelaide, as always, is much more than music. The 'dance', that makes up the World of Music and Dance acronym, is strongly represented this year by Spanish dancer and choreographer Maria Pages, a pioneer in contemporary flamenco. Her 80 minute work *Yo, Carmen (I, Carmen*) re-works Bizet's opera with the songs and poetry from which it derives. There will be two performances on Stage 2.

Australian/New Caledonian dance company, Marrugeku will perform *Le Dernier Appel/The Last Cry*, their exploration of the dilemmas of postcolonial Pacific communities , and, each night at the Frome Pavilion, the French Compagnie BiLBobaSSo, featuring Herve Perrin and Delphine Darus, will perform the fiery *Amor*, a study of a tempestuous couple who literally ignite the world around them as they quarrel. French street performance group Artonik returns with the visually explosive *The Colour of Time* in homage to Indian Holi festivals made vibrant by processional dance, body painting and costume.

Other park-wide events to look out for will be *Le Phun (The Leafies)* - sculptures made from tonnes of disintegrating leaves, and the mysterious, rising cardboard edifices of *Ephemeral City*, supervised by French artist and provocateur Olivier Grosstete. Tripodi praises the range of local groups and institutions – the SA Museum, Adelaide College of Art, Botanic High School and others – who have been collaborating with these events months before the WOMADelaide weekend begins.

Musing on our conversation, Annette Tripodi remarks: "It's always good to have this chat a few weeks out. We are so pre-occupied with getting the fine details and the logistics right that we forget how great the content is and how wonderful the celebration will be when everyone is there ..."

WOMADelaide opens at Botanic Park next Friday March 8 until Monday March 11.

Daily Review online March 2, 2019.

Adelaide Festival - ‘Experienc-ing’ cruelty and its consequences through transparent acting

Published: 2019-03-06 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

La Reprise. Histoire(s) du theatre (1) Conceived and directed by Milo Rau Space Theatre, Adelaide Festival Centre March 4. Bookings: adelaidefestival.com Tickets: $30- $79. Duration: 90 mins (no interval) Until March 7.

La Reprise, (The Repetition) a Belgian-German collaboration developed by director, Milo Rau, is an anatomy of a murder. It is also a careful dissection of the business and strategies of theatre. This intriguing essay on human transgression wittily explores its own best ways for making us, not just understand, but ‘experience’ cruelty and its consequences.

From the outset we are told it is based on a real crime. In 2012, in the Belgian town of Liege, four young men set upon, and brutally murdered, Ihsane Jarfi, a 32 year old gay man of North African descent. His naked body was found ten days later. The men were tried and found guilty.

Even from the opening statements (from actor Sabri Saad al Hamus) Rau’s brilliantly inventive production tells us this is theatre performed with new rules. Acting should be transparent and without ego. Sabri says it is like delivering a pizza. It’s not about the delivery person, it’s all about the pizza.

Just to remind us of the tricks of the trade, like Prospero, Sabri summons up a fog machine and delivers a haunting fragment from *Hamlet* – as his father’s ghost in Act I. This is the first of many prefigurings: telling us that tragic theatre enables the dead to speak, and be avenged.

Using a mix of live video feed and stage performance, a panel auditions actors to tell Jarfi’s tragic story. Suzy Cocco, cast as the dead man’s mother, is quizzed about her life, her Italian background, and whether she would perform nude.

Fabian Leeders, chosen as one of the killers, the feckless Wintgens, talks about his music interests (Aphex Twin, which later re-appears as the score) and is instructed to kiss a female interviewer, and then feign hitting her.

Tom Adjibi, who plays Jarfi like a martyred angel, talks about being typecast by ethnicity and his love for the music of Purcell. Every apparently random comment or detail is re-incorporated as the events of the crime are re-enacted and evaluated.

The staging is flawlessly assured as the camera moves from bedroom to nightclub to the Volkswagen car where the violence unfolds. The production circles remorselessly closer to the crime itself.

Performed in a miasma of stage fog, with Godard-like black and white close-ups on the screen, the murder sequence reprises the audition kissing, and the blows to the body with carefully timed sound effects. We are both inside the sickening violence and analysing the dynamics of impulsive behaviour.

La Reprise is innovative, intricate, beautifully judged, unforgettable pizza indeed.

“ ‘Experiencing’ cruelty and its consequences through transparent acting” *The Australian*, March 5, 2019, p.14.

Adelaide Festival - Hope survives bitter reality of refugee's life

Published: 2019-03-07 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

A Man of Good Hope Young Vic and Isango Ensemble Based on the book by Jonny Steinberg Royalty Theatre. March 5. Bookings: adelaidefestival.com Tickets: $30- $89. Duration: 2 hours 30 mins (including interval) Until March 11.

Asad Abdullahi is an ordinary man with a remarkable life story, re-told to author Jonny Steinberg and published as *A Man of Good Hope*. In 2016 it was turned into this compelling operatic production from South Africa's Isango Ensemble, with seasons at London's Young Vic and BAM in New York.

Asad's tribulations began in his native Somalia. In January 1991, when he was eight, he witnessed his mother's murder by militias in Mogadishu during the civil war which drove many thousands to seek refuge in Kenya. His childhood is one of repeated separation, loss and insecurity.

His journey is through the Horn of Africa via Tanzania and Zimbabwe to South Africa where, at the age of 20, after years waiting in camps, he hopes to prosper as a shopkeeper. He is resourceful, hard working, indomitable, but in the harsh townships a Muslim Somalian immigrant is a despised outsider, resented for success, distrusted outside his fractured clan.

Under Mark Dornford-May's assured direction, this vivid, sometimes harrowing, often exhilarating production brings us close to the refugee experience. The strong cast of 22 performers present a musical odyssey with a host of characters highlighting the struggle to maintain family ties, outrun adversity and defy despair.

Boldly lit by Manuel Manim and Sue Grey-Gardner, the stage is bursting with action. Lungelo Ngamlana's upbeat choreography is a dazzling mix of African dance and Broadway symmetry, the excellent music composed and conducted by Mandisi Dyantyis is scored for a marimba orchestra to which almost every cast member contributes at some time or other.

The libretto, in English and the Nguni Bantu Xhosa language, is spare and often haunting in its elegiac simplicity. The singing is uniformly splendid. Tragic scenes, like the death of Asad's mother, are enveloped in glorious choral lament, joyous times are underscored with pop, soul and African folk tune elements.

The performances are rich and finely drawn. Playing Asad as a young boy, Siphosethu Hintsho is outstanding. He is the focus for much of Act I and carries the narrative, and the emotional heft, memorably. Zoleka Mpotsha as Yindy, Asad's surrogate mother, and then Sadicya, the adult Asad's second wife, brings strong continuity to the story; Sinethemba Mdena is sinister as the vengeful Madoda.

As Asad in early manhood, Thandolwethu Mzembe captures his developing ambition and commercial acumen, while Ayanda Siyabonga Tikolo, as the mature Asad, embodies his gathering sadness and uncertainty. This man's good hopes are not yet completely dashed, but his story, and that of all unwelcome asylum seekers, is cause to wonder - why not?'

"Hope survives bitter reality of refugee's life", *The Australian*, March 7, 2019, p.15.

Adelaide Festival - Harrowing account of lives in limbo

Published: 2019-03-11 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Manus by Leila Hekmatnia, Keivan Sarreshteh Verbatim Theatre Group AC Arts Main Theatre March 7. Duration 75 minutes.

Devised and performed by the Iranian Verbatim Theatre Group from Tehran, *Manus* tells the stories of eight asylum seekers leaving persecution and personal danger in Iran, and the events leading to indefinite incarceration on Nauru and then, Manus Island in PNG.

Director, researcher and performer, Nazanin Sahamizadeh is the company's driving force and the text for *Manus* has been gathered from her mobile phone interviews and WhatsApp exchanges directly with internees. This was facilitated by Behrouz Boochani, the Iranian-Kurdish journalist and poet, whose vivid account of his life on Manus, *No Friend but the Mountains*, also written on WhatsApp, won the prestigious Victorian Prize for Literature in January.

The eight excellent performers, three women and five men, wait quietly for the audience to arrive. Then, fleetingly bathed in harsh spotlights, they step out of the black curtained surround of the stage and, in Persian with English surtitles, begin their narratives. Each is carrying a bright red jerry can, depicting meagre belongings, or a floatation device, or later, fuel for protest.

They stand, or sit, facing us, delivering threads of language that weave tragedy. These are educated people with careers and families. People like us, suffering danger, violence, medical neglect, self-harm, and harrowing deaths. "We ruined ourselves," one says, "We came here to be ruined." "The first question they ask us is : 'Do you want to kill yourself ?'" And, confrontingly, for its first ever audience in this country – "Manus is run by Australia."

This work is compelling in its quiet veracity; people talking directly of their hopes for better, deceived by smugglers, then detained in timeless limbo.

Behrouz Boochani, powerfully represented in his absence by Ehsan Bayatfar, is commandingly present in words. His poem, describing climbing a tree and threatening to jump unless the authorities play Mozart, crystallises the human struggle for recognition, dignity and truth. This is stark, matter-of-fact, and shaming theatre.

"Harrowing account of lives in limbo", *The Australian*, March 11, 2019, p.15.

Adelaide Festival - Satire a hilarious way of tackling minor troubles

Published: 2019-03-15 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Ulster American by David Ireland Traverse Theatre Company Dunstan Theatre, Adelaide Festival Centre March 13. Bookings: adelaidefestival.com Tickets: $40- $79. Duration: 1 hour 25 mins (no interval) Until March 17.

Ulster American, a new play by Belfast-born playwright David Ireland, is a raucous, funny, disconcerting satire on the cascading consequences of an ill-considered remark where, through social media, the private can become indelibly public. “I grew up during the Troubles,”writes Ireland,”I’m well aware of the dangers of tribalism and sanctimony. And sometimes the whole world feels like Northern Ireland in the 80s and 90s.”

This hit production from the 2018 Edinburgh Festival, which heads for Broadway later this year, is a bruising eisteddfod of escalating provocations and gotcha moments. The setting is a London apartment where Jay Conway, a middle-aged Oscar-winning Hollywood actor is meeting with up-and-coming English director, Leigh Carver and Ruth Davenport, an emerging playwright from Northern Ireland.

There is ripe comedy in the broad-brush portraits. Jay (Darrell D’Silva) is the mansplaining, manspreading egoist, full of actorly talk of ‘process’ and ‘journey’, name-checking the famous, parading his AA credentials, and unctuously faking humility as he bullies and badgers the younger, earnest, but overtly ambitious Leigh (Robert Jack).

Into this antler-rattling contest comes Ruth (Lucianne McEvoy) from Ulster with a play about Tommy, a Unionist who wreaks lethal havoc on the Catholic citizenry in the name of true destiny.

Things really begin to unravel when Jay, himself of Catholic heritage, discovers to his horror that he is starring in a play entirely devoted to the Protestant cause. When Ruth unhelpfully declares herself British, not Irish, Leigh enters the fray with lame attempts to make the play a fuzzy non-specific metaphor. Things worsen when Ruth tells him she voted ‘Leave’ in the Brexit referendum.

Becky Minto’s functional set, a modern apartment with couches in muted blues and greys, is warmly lit by Kate Bonney. Director Gareth Nicholls keeps the pace fast and farcical as the actors engage with each other and Ireland’s frantic, transgressive script. The expletives fly and the invective is both comic and disconcerting.

Like the plotlines, the performances are variously and hilariously monstrous. Darrell D’Silva’s Jay is an overbearing, dissembling buffoon, Lucianne McEvoy’s Ruth is both heroine and devious opportunist, and as Leigh, Robert Jack, marvellously dithers and manoeuvres in a desperate self-serving attempt to become a champion of new Irish writing.

In its impertinence *Ulster American* parodies problem plays like Yasmina Reza’s *God of Carnage*, or local works like *The Slap*, where a micro-event is amplified into social catastrophe. In turning to rough, outlandish comedy, the energetic Traverse Company do not belittle the importance of striving for ethical behaviour and just principles, but for 90 minutes they help us to lighten the load.

“Satire a hilarious way of tackling minor troubles” *The Australian,* March 15, 2019, p.15.

2020s Reviews

Murray Bramwell's Cultural Moment of 2019

Published: 2020-01-02 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Among many cultural moments this year, two stand out. Both in the theatre. Both test the possibilities and limits of performance and representation. In the Adelaide Festival, director Milo Lau's Belgian-German collaboration *La Reprise (The Repetition)* deconstructs a gay-hate murder which took place in 2012, in Liege, Belguim.

Dissecting the business and strategies of theatre, it explores both human transgression and the tricks of acting - the better for us to understand an unfathomable cruelty. Rau proposes a theatre with new rules. Only in the last ten minutes, in a miasma of lights, video screens and simulated violence, is the crime performed - and simultaneously analysed. *La Reprise* is intricate, intelligent and original theatre.

In Joseph Mitchell's excellent OzAsia Festival, is *The Dark Master*, an excursion in hyper-reality by Japanese director Kuro Tanino. A young backpacker happens into a run-down bistro in Osaka. The misanthropic chef serves a delicious omelette and traps him into running the business for him.

Using a cordless earpiece (the audience also has a headphone link) he instructs the unworldly young man in the art of cooking, supervising through hidden cameras. Gradually our hero becomes a master cook. The food is literally prepared in a real kitchen, the audience savouring every aroma. *The Dark Master* is a fable, a dream play, and David Lynch surrealism. It is funny, sinister, shocking, and wholly captivating.

"*Murray Bramwell's Cultural Moment of 2019*" *The Australian*, January 2, 2020, p.12.

From torture to maximum torque - Adelaide Fringe 2020

Published: 2020-02-17 *Adelaide Fringe*

The Nights by Henry Naylor Gilded Balloon and Redbeard Theatre In Association with Holden Street Theatres. The Arch, Holden Street. February 15. Bookings Tickets: $ 18- $ 28. Until March 15. Duration 60 minutes.

Tartuffe by Moliere. Adapted by Liz Lochhead. Ed Littlewood Productions in association with Holden Street Theatre, Royal Lyceum Theatre Edinburgh and the Stephen Dunn Theatre Fund. The Arch, Holden Street. February 15. Bookings Tickets: $ 18- $ 28. Until March 15. Duration 60 minutes.

Frankenstein: How to Make a Monster Battersea Arts Centre and BAC Beatbox Academy. The Attic, University of Adelaide Union Building. February 14. Bookings : the RCC.com.au. Tickets : $ 24.50 RCC members - $25-$35. Until March 15. Duration 60 minutes.

Now in its eleventh year, Holden Street Theatres director Martha Lott's excellent Fringe program includes the best and most recent work from Edinburgh, including companies she sponsors to attend.

The works of Henry Naylor are a prime example. Lott has already programmed four of his plays - three, *Echoes*, *Angel* and *Borders*, all from the bleakly-named *Arabian Nightmares* series. His newest, *The Nights*, is another triumph.

In Naylor's terse style, *The Nights* is a vivid mash-up of fact and fiction, ethical and geopolitical contradictions. Journalist Jane FitzCarter (Aoife Lennon) traumatised by the death of a colleague in a grisly ISIS beheading, visits Iraqi war hero Captain Kane (Nicholas Boulton) secluded in Leeds, for a reaction to a story she is writing on an ISIS war bride.

Crisply directed by Louise Skaaning, the outstanding performances are a descent into the lower depths of repressed memory and inescapable guilt. Kane relives war atrocities triggered by blind vengeance, describing torture crimes replicating those of Saddam himself. In less than sixty minutes Naylor's play take us to the theatrical edge but never over the cliff. *The Nights* is lucid, complex and disturbingly current.

At first glance, restaging *Tartuffe*, Moliere's 17th century satire on religious hypocrisy, in a Scottish parlour in the 1940s, seems a stretch. Instead, this canny version, sharply directed by Tony Cownie, and propelled by a brilliant rhyming adaptation (illuminated with English surtitles) by Glaswegian Poet Laureate, Liz Lochhead, is proof that vicious mischief can infiltrate any unwary household.

With a cut-down cast of four, the sub-plots are reduced to noises off but the farcical pace, so cleverly plotted in the original, gets maximum torque. As Orgon, the father, smitten with the false piety of the bogus priest Tartuffe, Henry Ward is a comic delight. Joyce Falconer brings a salty wit to Dorine, the enterprising maid, Nicola Roy's Elmire expertly manages the seduction scene while Andy Clarke's moustachioed imposter, Tartuffe is revealed in his long johns, and his infamy. Like single malt, the Scots dialect is delicious to hear. This *Tartuffe* is a wee treasure.

Another outstanding transfer from Edinburgh is London's BAC Beatbox Academy's *Frankenstein: The Making of a Monster* performing as part of David Sefton's RCC Fringe programme at Adelaide Uni. This high-voltage interpretation of the Mary Shelley fable - of the hubristic doctor whose misplaced creation is both monster and victim - is a non-stop spectacle.

Seated on huge speaker boxes the six versatile performers -Aminita, Glitch, WIZ-RD, Native, ABH and Grove – mix virtuosic hip hop solos with exhilarating group chants, harmony singing and hyper-skilful beatbox rhythms. Directed by Conrad Murray, and bathed in Sherry Coenen's soft Gothic lighting, this vibrant ensemble explores the everyday monstrosity of social media, body image and the surveillance state. *Frankenstein* has all the makings of a Fringe hit.

"From torture to maximum torque", *The Australian*, February 20, 2020, p.15.

Daily Review - The Necks

Published: 2020-02-25 *Adelaide Fringe · Music*

The Necks RCC Level 5 Union House, University of Adelaide

February 21.

In the house of the Adelaide Fringe there are many mansions. Venues spring up all over the CBD each with distinctive programs and loyal audiences. In the East End, The Garden of Unearthly Delights at Rundle Park and Gluttony at the adjacent Rymill Park attract huge crowds for the four weeks of Fringe activity. The Holden Street Theatres at Hindmarsh have a first-rate program, curated by director Martha Lott, many of them freshly-imported headliners from last year's Edinburgh Fringe.

And at Adelaide Uni, for a second year running, RCC (no longer known as the Royal Croquet Club) has benignly commandeered the campus for a rich range of events, programmed by former Adelaide Festival director, David Sefton.

Over four festivals Sefton hosted outstanding contemporary music with residencies from John Zorn and Gavin Bryars, performances by Kronos Quartet, Laurie Anderson and Van Dyke Parks, post-rock musicians such as The National and Godspeed You ! Black Emperor and many others in the Unsound Adelaide programs.

To last year's RCC he brought Pussy Riot and the Ziporyn

Ambient Orchestra and this time his program features Stereolab, Lydia Lunch Retrovirus, A tribute to the Lost Songs of the Triffids singer David McComb, a recital of Steve Reich's *Music for 18 Musicians* and a one-night only performance from The Necks.

Formed in 1987, The Necks have gained an extraordinary reputation not only in this country but enjoy a devoted following in Europe and North America as leading exponents in ambient improvised performance. Dissolving the boundaries between jazz, electronica and minimalist chamber music The Necks are as distinctive as they are unique.

Over more than twenty albums, this trio – featuring Chris Abrahams on piano and Hammond organ, Tony Buck on drums and percussion and Lloyd Swanton on electric and double bass – has explored a variety of musical territories. From their debut CD *Sex* to their haunting soundtrack to the grimly brilliant film, *The Boys* in 1998, the catchy beats of *Drive By* in 2003 to current studio work such as last year's *Three*, The Necks have established and sustained a remarkable output for their ubiquitous Fish of Milk label.

On stage in the makeshift Level 5 space in Union House the group prepares to play to a capacity crowd braced for a night of original sounds and maximum invention. With a total lack of fanfare the musicians take up their instruments. No greetings, no introductions, they settle into the meditative positions they hold for the entire evening.

Abrahams begins with small slow chords on the piano, trickling, lightly-syncopated repetitions. Lloyd Swanton, head bowed, holds his double bass as the piano lightly explores its motif. Almost imperceptibly, Tony Buck brushes the cymbals. It is tiny and tentative and the audience is drawn in like moths to a very pale flame.

The music just appears as if conjured from the air. It is said The Necks begin with a blank page. It is perhaps a *tabula rasa*. Or raga more like, because their work invites comparison with the Indian carnatic improvisations of Ali Akhbar Khan, the violinist L. Subramaniam and so many others seen and heard on the WOMAD circuit and in Indian festivals.

The players begin to develop motifs and modal loops. Abrahams' mellow harmonic chords now joined by Swanton's sweeping bowed bass lines which then turn into a repeated plucked pulsing bass. Buck is mixing a soft bell sound with his cymbal brushes. The sound is soothing, intriguing and is quietly gathering. We are at the 16 minute mark and this music morphs and changes, ebbs and flows, in small incremental steps.

The musicians are entirely absorbed in their playing, looking down into their work. Abrahams, methodical and restrained at the acoustic piano, Swanton puttering and bowing the intricate and insistent bass line and Buck finding ways to scrape and agitate the drumhead while developing an insistent brush and timpani mallet rhythm that begins to drive the composition past the 28 minute mark. Unlike so many bands, the players never exchange glances or visibly share ideas. There is neither a nod nor a wink. It is solemn and intensely concentrated. The audience leans in even further.

By 36 minutes the music is now a series of swells and disturbances. It is hard to know where these changes have come from. We are watching every step but these shifts elude detection. The music keeps becoming before our eyes but we catch each change too late . It is strange and engaging, like watching an eclipse and somehow blinking just as the celestial bodies move into unison.

The intensity gets greater and you start to feel unhinged. The insistence is disturbing. I find myself both enjoying the constant threading and looping and wanting it to ease up, to exhaust these repetitions and disperse. But it is 48 minutes now and there is a dervish-like twirl and rapture to the rhythmic piano thrumming its tattoo, the bass lines are coming up from the floorboards and the drumming rattles and beats in fast march time. At 52 minutes the music stops as suddenly as it began. The musicians briefly bow and leave the stage. Swanton announces a 20 minute break before the second set returns.

And the players resume a second time for 44 minutes - even more focused and inventive than before. Each musician is subsumed in the collective sound. No solos, no leads, no ego, no hi-jinx. There are other musicians who chart this territory. Can from Germany for instance, Brian Eno in his studio constructions. The long career of Keith Jarrett is a journey into melodic and harmonic labyrinths, some whimsical, some sublime and some perverse. But there is something austere, Zen-like and instinctively apt about the way with The Necks do things. They have discovered a music that is located somewhere between the head and the heart - and whichever way you turn, it is a fascinating place to visit.

Five Stars

Daily Review, February 25, 2020.

Adelaide Festival - The energetic tango of youth, one step at a time

Published: 2020-02-26 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Dance Nation by Clare Barron State Theatre Company South Australia and Belvoir In association with Adelaide Festival. Scott Theatre, University of Adelaide. February 25. Tickets $ 39 - $ 79. Bookings adelaidefestival.com.au. Until March 7. Belvoir season from March 14.

Shortlisted for a Pulitzer Prize in 2019, *Dance Nation* is a funny, ferocious and closely-observed study of a group of pre-teen girls (and one boy) in a dance troupe competing in a series of play-offs to reach national prominence.

Writer Clare Barron explores, challenges and sometimes openly satirizes ideas of competition and excellence, confidence and self-esteem, motivation and single-mindedness. The world of dance is in a spin and the experience for this disparate group of adolescents is turbulent, painful, and contradictory. It is also sisterly, illuminating and a glimpse of their futures to come.

Casting a diverse group of older actors to play the dancers, Barron says : "Think of it as a ghost play, the actors' older bodies are haunting these 13 year olds. We are getting to see who they grow up to be...At times we should be fully in 13 year old land with all its ridiculousness, pain and pleasure. And at other times we should be palpably aware of the actors' real ages."

Director Imara Savage has admirably brought this intense, dramatically unconventional script together with a terrific cast and creative team. From the madcap sailors' dance in the opening scene (which leaves one of the dancers on the floor with a comically gory leg wound) to the scenes of teenage sexual curiosity, peer insecurity, parental inquisition and rage against the nascent beginnings of gender stereotyping, this production captures the play's mercurial intelligence and energy.

Jonathan Oxlade's set – essentially a dance rehearsal space surrounded by perspex mirrors and bright red surfaces, vibrantly lit in neon and strobe by Alexander Berlage - brings the action close and confronting. Oxlade's favourite Seventies costumes are zany and endearing and choreographer Laurisa McGowan's "acro-lyrical" *World On Fire*, a dance tribute to Mohandas Gandhi, is hilarious, complete with synth fanfares from composer Luke Smiles.

The performances are excellent. Chika Ikogwe and Yvette Lee's portrayal of the rival dancers Zuzu and Amina captures the paradox of the star system. Tara Morice's Sofia is bold in her sexual precocity and mortified by her menstruation. Elena Carapetis is memorable as a chorus of Moms egging their children on.

Tim Overton is spot-on as Luke, the beta male, and Mitchell Butel, in his first performance since becoming Artistic Director at State, is the martinet director, Dance Teacher Pat, a shrewdly comic Bob Fosse parody of the manipulative egoist playing favourites.

As the untalented Maeve, Rebecca Massey is key to the play's random exploration of the vortex of unconscious life and sense of the cosmic, and Amber McMahon is outstanding as Ashlee, whose wolvish monologue - about her concealed, interior sense of power and agency - is a rallying call to arms.

"The energetic tango of youth, one step at a time", *The Australian*, February 27, 2020. p.15.

Adelaide Festival - Exactly what this Doctor ordered

Published: 2020-02-29 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

The Doctor by Robert Icke Very freely adapted from Arthur Schnitzler's Professor Bernhardi. Almeida Theatre, London. in association with Adelaide Festival. Dunstan Playhouse. Adelaide Festival Centre. February 28. Tickets $ 45 - $129. Bookings: adelaidefestival.com.au. Duration: 2 Hours 40 minutes including interval. Until March 8.

Robert Icke has energised current UK theatre with his versions of Aeschylus's *Oresteia*, Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* and George Orwell's *1984*. He describes adaptation as "like using a foreign plug. You are in a country where your hair dryer won't work when you plug it straight in. You have to find the adaptor which will let the electricity of now into the old thing and make it function."

With his newest production, *The Doctor*, which opened in London in August last year and is now playing in the Adelaide Festival, Icke has definitely plugged in to the electricity of now.

Using Viennese playwright Arthur Schnitzler's fascinating 1912 play, *Professor Bernhardi*, about a Jewish medical doctor who refuses to allow a priest to give the last rites to a young girl dying from a botched abortion, Icke has created 21st century Ruth Wolff, a high profile director of the Elizabeth Clinic. Bernhardi is pilloried in the press in an anti-semitic outcry which ruins his career. Wolff, nominally Jewish, is similarly attacked, but is also embroiled in online trolling and media accusations of white privilege, elitism and gender bias. The private clinic she runs is caught in a PR nightmare and in multiple power plays and double-crosses Wolff becomes the sacrificial lamb.

The play is long and detailed but Robert Icke's direction is brisk and bold. Hildegard Bechtler's curved wood panel set (simply but warmly lit by Natasha Chivers' suspended fluoro tubes) functions as both work and domestic space with a long steel frame table and benches (moving slowly on a small revolve) used for staff meetings, kitchen conversations and Wolff's solitary contemplations. High above the stage Hannah Ledwidge and her drum kit drive the action, along with Tom Gibbons' heart monitor soundscape.

The cast of twelve is remarkable to watch. The diverse casting is deliberately against type – ethnically, and in gender-crossing - and the multiple roles work to challenge our assumptions and biases.

The scheming male surgeon Hardiman is played by Naomi Wirthner, Brian Cyprian by Anni Domingo, well in to the play we discover white-skinned Jamie Parker is a black priest. The layers of identity, the markers and signifiers which we rely on in theatre casting are subverted and vividly dramatise the play's themes especially during the television panel interrogation which compounds Wolff's predicament.

There are many excellent performances. Joy Richardson as Wolff's partner Charlie, Liv Hill as Sami her troubled young confidante, Shelley Conn as Flint, her protégé turned cabinet minister. But it is Juliet Stevenson who galvanises the production. Her clarity and intelligence, the unerring precision she brings to this principled, dogmatic, flawed yet heroic central character is extraordinary. *The Doctor* will not heal our ills but it has given us a formidable diagnosis of our time.

"Exactly what this Doctor ordered", *The Australian*, March 3, 2020. P.14.

Murray Bramwell

Daily Review - Adelaide Fringe

Published: 2020-03-03 *Adelaide Fringe*

Erth's Dinosaur Zoo Elder Hall. University of Adelaide. RCC February 29. Until March 12.

In the extensive kids program in the Adelaide Fringe there is even something for the junior palaeontologist. And no better than the gee-whiz large scale puppetry of Erth-Visual and Physical studio to bring the ancient past vividly back before us. Erth certainly has nothing to show more fair than its Dinosaur Zoo travelling show (written and directed by Scott Wright) returning to the RCC program to amaze a new batch of young fans of very scary big critters.

The stage of Adelaide Uni's imposingly Victorian Elder Hall could be ready for a meeting of a learned society. Instead the seats are packed with young families –parents and children mostly pre-school to five or so. The sides of the stage are decorated with inflatable plants rather resembling giant asparagus. Our bearded guide to the zoo, introduced only as Miles, comes out in familiar wildlife show presenter garb – green polo shirt, khaki shorts and Blundstones.

His spiel is a sometimes uneasy mix of reassurance to the kids, useful explanatory commentary and zany asides to the parents. But the main thing is that the show is informative. I suspect that the audience I was in was a bit young for the event but there were a few eight to ten year olds who were Mastermind standard in their dinosaur knowledge and Miles did his best to field information from them.

So full marks to the boy who correctly identifies 65 million as the number of years ago that dinosaurs, along with most of the planet, went extinct in about ten days from a catastrophic firestorm caused by a massive asteroid colliding with Earth in the vicinity of the Mexican Yucatan Peninsula.

Then to get things moving, Cat, Mick and Tom, three zoo keeper/handlers/ puppeteers appear, wrangling some little T–Rex babies, wriggling and gnashing and looking fascinatingly believable. Willing volunteers are recruited from the audience and, watching out for fingers, the children are suddenly in an animated puppet petting zoo.

The creatures arrive in quick succession. The audience is buzz- bombed by Meganeura – gigantic dragon flies with wingspans up to 90 cms. Adding some further astounding data, Miles describes scorpions as big as dogs, and spiders the size of cats. We are told about unique Australian discoveries such as those made by Tom Rich and Patricia Vickers-Rich at Dinosaur Cove in the Otway Ranges. An entirely new species was named Leaellynasaurus - after their young daughter.

Erth's Dinosaur Zoo unveils raptors, a full grown Tyrannosaurus Rex, and a gigantic herbivorous Brontosaurus looms over the side of the stage. The puppets are immense and impressive, the artwork and detail are astonishing. The children are as animated as the creatures and, up on stage, assist in emergency dinosaur tooth removal and other useful duties.

It may be a long hour for some, but it is full of things to know and think about. That also goes for reviewers and parents. What I liked most is that Erth's Dinosaur Zoo is about science, especially Australian science, and provides insight into what field research and painstaking empirical application have accomplished, and continue to do. No one here is talking about geological time beginning 6,000 years ago, or science being an optional belief.

I'm just sorry there weren't more eight to ten (and older) dinosaur connoisseurs gathered there in Elder Hall to feast on the facts.

FOUR Stars

Prehysterical Head First Acrobatics Gluttony, Rymill Park February 23. Until March 15.

Prehysterical is well-named. Unlike Erth and the dinosaurs, this physical farce for little ones has some excellent moves, acrobatics and pratfalls, but a storyline and incidental slapstick business that verge on woeful.

The show is built around three cave people. Based on more recent paleontology, it is almost slanderous to call them Neanderthals. The material is a million miles from the wit of cartoon strips of Johnny Hart's BC, Alley Oop or The Flintstones. But Erg, Grunt and Ow (I think I've got the names right) are there to wave their cudgels and have fun with the audience - particularly the appreciative kids sitting down in the front rows.

The performers in animal skin outfits display some quality backflips, double handstands and other impressive turns. Events are propelled by a nicely-curated non-stop jungle stomp music soundtrack. A length of blue fabric is unfurled to make a river and much comedy is had trying to swing across. The acrobatics get more elaborate with head-to-headstands. A cudgel and spear fight turns mockingly into a slow-motion opera to the theme from *Lakme*.

There are plenty of noises off. Lions and tigers roar through the tannoys as the performers labour to invent fire. They learn tolerance and co-operation, of course, and in refreshingly positive gender bias, it is always Erg the female pioneer who is first to make the connection or solve the problem. She also excels on the cloudswing and the virtuoso hoop spinning.

Prehysterical kept the key stakeholders very happy. My almost-five year old grandson was well pleased with the physical stunts and most of the slapstick. But the show could still use some tweaking. The acrobatics are Head First terrific but the concept sometimes comes a tired second.

THREE stars

Luminarium Architects of Air Barr Smith Lawns, University of Adelaide. RCC February 29. Until March 15.

A luminarium is an inflatable sculpture of air and light. It is also one you can take off your shoes and socks and walk through, explore, sit around and wonder at. It has been described as "somewhere between a womb and a cathedral." Cathedral works best for me because there is much upward gazing and contemplation and the colour and designs are vivid and amazing in their bold simplicity. It is as though someone has tried to emulate the Blue Mosque in Istanbul in PVC.

Devised and built in Nottingham, England, by founder and designer Alan Parkinson, the Architects of Air company has been making and developing pneumatic structures since 1992. More than three million people have since passed through their inflatable portals in more than 40 countries.

Parkinson says he wants "to share my sense of wonder at the phenomenon of light." The thin membrane PVC (about the thickness of a T-shirt, they say) is custom-made for the company and the structures last about 300 days of exhibition time, spread over four years before they are replaced and recycled. Constantly on the move and in demand internationally, the structures have to be portable, well drained, stable in windy conditions and allow wheelchair access.

We are briefed before entering the inner sanctum of the luminariam. Children are to stay close to their parents, no running and banging into the walls, no loud noises. In other words, this is not a Bouncy Castle. Once inside these reminders seem self-evident. The experience is both soothing and illuminating. The colours are intense – rich greens and blues which, when you turn a corner, unexpectedly bleed into scarlet red.

People move around calmly and respectfully. We are surrounded by sparse and soothing Eighties Eno-style ambient electronica. It all fits together. There are numerous chambers and connecting corridors but it is a benign maze. Some sit and relax, surveying the abstract hard-edge Gothic and Islamic motifs, drenched in the colours of psychedelia. From another angle we can see the silhouettes of the trees outside etched on the canopy.

Twenty minutes is the usual staying time and, when I left, the waiting queue ran almost up to the Barr Smith library. Luminariam is well worth the watching – and the wait.

FOUR stars.

Daily Review, March 4, 2020.

Daily Review - WOMADelaide 2020 Returns to Botanic Park

Published: 2020-03-03 *WOMADelaide · Music*

Director Ian Scobie talks with Murray Bramwell about Adelaide's most enduring international music event.

This coming Friday, March 6, marks the opening of the four day WOMADelaide music festival. With its odd portmanteau name (WOMAD is an acronym for World of Music and Dance) the South Australian version of the UK festival, originally founded and promoted by Peter Gabriel, began as part of Rob Brookman's Adelaide Festival in 1992.

There have been 23 festivals since then – it became an annual fixture in 2003 and a four day event in 2010. Since 1995 the organisation has been managed by APA (Arts Projects Australia) and the current director, Ian Scobie is the sole remaining original member of the APA team.

As WOMADelaide approaches its 30th anniversary, I asked Scobie what he considers the secret, not only of the festival's success, but also its longevity. He talks about the great advantage of having unique access to Botanic Park, a green oasis right in Adelaide's CBD with ample roaming space for 12,000 people at any one time as well as seven different performance stages.

"We are lucky with WOMAD. Firstly it's in a city that is familiar with the idea of festivals. It has drunk the festival kool-aid. People have grown up with it. It is real and palpable. And the Events SA funding is absolutely rock solid. I talk to colleagues interstate and know its hard yakka without funding confidence. We can talk to people three years in advance knowing that the funding and infrastructure are in place. I can see things and plan. I don't have to convince a board and so on

The festival also offers a carefully managed experience for both artists and audiences. Scobie sees this as an international WOMAD characteristic, whether the UK, Europe or New Zealand version.

"It is interesting. Ziggy Marley (one of the 2020 headliners in Adelaide) played at WOMAD UK last year. He was impressed. He got it. Being in a like-minded audience and out of the rock and roll thing of 'arrive in town-practice-put on a show-leave'. Artists universally respond to WOMADelaide in such a positive manner. They love the city, they love the park, they love the markets. It's great."

It is also a factor that the festival began as part of the Adelaide Festival where the etiquette of hospitality was a key feature of Writers Week and the performance program generally.

"I remember the director, Clifford Hocking, giving me the 101 lesson when I worked with him on the Adelaide Festival. That was - to remember that you are inviting people to be a guest in your home and essentially you need to understand that they are feeling nervous, they have travelled a long way. They need to feel welcome and looked after.

"Their technical requirements will be met - but more fundamentally there is a level of respect for them which puts them in the best frame of mind to do their best work. Then it will be received well. And if that's not the case, then all this other human static gets in there – and people don't feel looked after.

"I have the same view of our audience. You have 20,000 guests who are invited to your backyard for a party. You want to make sure they are comfortable and there's shade, because if all those basic things aren't there you have missed the point – if people aren't comfortable and can't hear. You want to get rid of all that."

The 2020 WOMADelaide has some big names coming home to roost. Celebrated Malian griot singer Salif Keita revisits for a fourth and perhaps final time, esteemed US gospel singer and civil rights activist, Mavis Staples, is also returning after her splendid set in 2008 with her exceptional We'll Never Turn Back album.

Twenty years on, early festival favourites The Cat Empire will play the 10 pm spot on Friday night. The remarkable Blind Boys of Alabama – a musical organisation founded in 1939 and rejuvenated in the 21st century with collaborators such as Robert Randolph, Ben Harper and Marc Cohn - also feature on the opening night. Frequent WOMADelaide highlight, Indian classical violinist L.Subramaniam will perform during the day on Saturday and for a seated event on Sunday night.

Scobie is especially pleased to program Ziggy Marley. "He's not singing his dad's hits. He's a reggae performer in his own right. He's another generation and he's very positive. 'Love will solve the world's problems'. It is a great attitude to have. It's a joyous show. "

I ask him how the program is compiled and he explains it is a joint venture. "It is between two and a half of us," he says cryptically.

"It is between (Operations and Program Manager) Annette Tripodi and me in Adelaide, and Paula Henderson from WOMAD UK. She worked on the first WOMADelaide in 1992. We have worked together on and off over a long time. We have a sympatico understanding, a shorthand. Paula sees something and says 'that will really work in Adelaide'. She's our UK eyes. It is a collaboration between us and the UK, so there a lot of to and fro. It's a mosaic, a puzzle, getting the pieces to fit.

"I think the festival experience for the patron needs to be discovery, surprise, some old friends, some beautiful music and great artists. They have to be at the right level. We've had some interesting examples of artists who were not quite ready- and then they are. Annette will sometimes suggest something and it's not the top of my list. But it's not my festival- and that's a fundamental difference from other festival models.

"The curatorial role is that you are responsible for a cultural collection in a gallery, rather than picking favourites. You don't have a program full of work from just one country, you need light and shade. Every time you program a slot there's one less opportunity for something else. Sometimes finding a group from Timor or Malaysia is way of sharpening the experience. Ideally, I like the festival to have quite a few things that are a new thing to me as well – rather than same, same. "

I ask Scobie which selections he is particularly pleased with and he begins to thumb the brochure for examples. Floating Flowers, a dance work from Taiwanese company B. Dance, led by director /choreographer Po-Cheng Tsai, springs to mind.

"They were a classic last-minute surprise. I saw about 20 minutes of Floating Flowers in passing in Edinburgh and thought 'this is extraordinary.' I gave them my card and said 'you must come to WOMAD.'

"Ustad Saami from Pakistan (a practitioner of a vocal style dating back to the 13th century) He's special. His voice is exquisitely transporting but it has a rasping quality. It's not like Nusrat (the late Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan , WOMADelaide legend from the original 1992 festival). It doesn't pick you up in a warm blanket and take you, but I found it unusual and a real force.

"Every time I have pushed the envelope the audiences have lapped it up. I think programmers can be too cautious. The public has bought a ticket for an experience . They are up for it. They don't just want familiar pop. "

Other selections he singles out include Ifriqiyya Electrique from the Maghreb (historically known as Ifriqiyya) the region of North West Africa consisting of Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia and Western Sahara. Their concert experience has been described as a combination of Afro-Tunisian ritual trance and Western post-industrial punk. Their most recent album is entitled Laylet El Booree.

The eleven piece Malaysian group, Orang Orang Drum Theatre also rates a Director's mention: "I saw them and they were young and enthusiastic. Energised and keen to present their cultural story which I think is fantastic. We are programming a whole new generation of musicians."

Which leads to Scobie to talking about Scottish performer Kathryn Joseph whose music he describes as a cross-over with performance art. Her first album, Bones You Have Thrown Me and Blood I Have Spilled, won Scottish album of the year in 2015. Her second recording From When I Wake The Want Is, released in August 2018, is compelling to listen to. Her plaintive, trickling piano aptly matching her burred vibrato vocal. The arrangements with percussion and discreet electronica complete the effect.

With her long, thick hair and crofter funk outfits she is imposing and other-worldly. An original like Kate Bush or Bjork, she is also re-invigorating Scottish folk traditions. Kathryn Joseph plays twice, Saturday and Monday – both times at the Moreton Bay stage. Check out her BBC Scotland live sessions on YouTube. She is not to be missed.

Women musicians are always well represented at WOMADelaide and in 2020 the calibre of their contribution is especially evident. The list is extraordinary. Harpist, Catrin Finch (duetting with kora player Seckou Keita) will play a fusion of Welsh traditional music and Senegalese Mandika rhythms.

Other outstanding performers to check out are the spectacular PNG/Australian Ngaiire, whose terrific recent album, Blastoma is worth checking out. UK contemporary folk song-writer Laura Marling, whose recordings have been nominated for Mercury Awards and a Grammy, will perform once only on Monday.

Aldous Harding has for a time now been a WOMAD NZ favourite and played Laneway Festival in Adelaide several years ago. Finally she gets to play Botanic Park. Like Kathryn Joseph, she is in the Joanna Newsom vein. A mainstay of the thriving Lyttleton music scene outside Christchurch, New Zealand, Harding has two excellent albums. The first, self-titled, with songs such as Stop Your Tears, Hunter and Titus Alone and her more recent CD, Designer. She has one concert only at 5.15 on Saturday.

The unique Kate Miller-Heidke, featured in the current Adelaide Festival's extraordinary Virtual Reality installation Eight in collaboration with Michel van der Aa, will perform just once time, on Friday night.

Other women artists to watch out for include Luisa Sobral from Portugal, singing from her newest album Rosa, dedicated to her young daughter; the five member Mexican group Flor de Toloache; the talented Indigenous singer, Deline Briscoe showcasing her excellent Wawu album; and acclaimed US traditional country performer Rhiannon Giddens, blending her Appalachian and minstrel fiddle and banjo sounds with Francesco Turrisi on the Sicilian tamburello. There are more – Marina Satti and Fones, Gelarah Pour's Garden from Iran, Spinifex Gum from the Pilbara country and Korean exponent of the double-headed Janggu drum, Kim So Ra.

WOMADelaide is also a showcase for visual art works, dance, French strolling theatre from Company Archibald Caramantran, the virtuoso acrobatics of Gravity and Other Myths and, featured each night in Frome Park, As the World Tipped from the UK based Wired Aerial Theatre, presenting spectacular high flying movement in sync with massive projected images highlighting the very real and present danger of climate change.

This presentation could not be more timely after a summer of ferocious bushfires, wildlife and habitat devastation, and an urgent need for cogent scientific public advocacy against the continuing obstinacy of government and vested interests.

Last year, Ian Scobie admits he was worried that As The World Tipped "would be passé because of the breakdown of the Copenhagen talks. But it is now very current. There will be references to the United Nations IPPC Report on climate change and a coda with a recorded message from Greta Thunberg.

The Planet Talks forums will continue the WOMADelaide tradition with speakers on sustain-ability, climate change, big tech and data ethics, politics, transformative change and sleep research.

I ask Scobie if, after so many WOMADs in a row, it has become a routine thing. His reply :

"I do love it still. I have my moments, of course. But then I see something and think 'I've got to have that.' The French Gratte Ciel company's Place des Anges in 2018 was an example. Of the things I saw last year, Kathryn Joseph was one , Floating Flowers another.

"I remember things I saw in the Adelaide Festival. Peter Brook's The Ik and Pere Ubu at the Quarry back in 1980. Having those moments is key. And I think it is for our audience. You have to find those things which are a part of cultural memory and people's lives. And they look back and say 'do you remember that time ?' Part of the task is to have those WOMAD peaks. That 'wow' moment, that full stop, or exclamation mark, is why culture matters. It makes you stop and think. It gives you that space in your soul."

WOMADelaide opens March 6 until March 9. Botanic Park, Adelaide .

Daily Review. March 3, 2020.

Adelaide Festival - 150 Psalms

Published: 2020-03-04 *Adelaide Festival · Music*

150 Psalms Leadership (Concert 9) Pilgrim Church, Flinders St. March 2.

150 Psalms, a choral presentation of twelve themed concerts performed over four days, is one of the centrepieces of the 2020 Adelaide Festival as it celebrates its 60th year. It is an extensive project, conceived by Tido Visser, managing director of the Netherlands Chamber Choir, and was first performed in 2017 at the Utrecht Festival Oude Muziek.

The Adelaide event is its fourth version, featuring The Netherlands Chamber Choir, The Norwegian Soloists' Choir, The Tallis Scholars and, from Australia, The Song Company.

Each of the concerts has a theme. From one to twelve they are:

A Mirror for Today's Society, Trust, Safety, Justice, Abandonment, Gratitude, Powerlessness, Suffering, Leadership, Path of Life, Power and Oppression and *Celebration of Life*. These are divided up among the choirs, except for the final concert - featuring all of the singers in the project. Venues are spread around the city and among religious denominations – St Peter's Cathedral, the Adelaide Hebrew Congregation in Glenside, St Xavier's Cathedral, Pilgrim Church and, for a secular conclusion, Adelaide Town Hall.

Leadership, ninth in the series is a midday concert at Pilgrim Church. As we line up for the event, Amnesty International volunteers are collecting signatures against off-shore refugee detention. Amnesty is a co-sponsor of the *150 Psalms* event. Each concert is also prefaced by a speaker.

For *Leadership,* it is Francis Sullivan, former CEO of the Truth, Justice and Healing Council from 2012 to 2018. They were responsible for co-ordinating the response of the Catholic Church throughout the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Abuse. He describes it as "the gig from Hell."

So often we associate notions of leadership with authority, command and delegation. Sullivan's emphasis is on pausing to listen, in not rushing to judgement. An instinctive response, he observes, is not an intuitive one. To pause and consider, instead of resorting to defensiveness and denial, these are the virtues.

It is a simple and direct account he gives of paying attention – to stories of concealment, of people "disbelieved, disparaged and discarded." One person at the hearings said to Sullivan – "Don't you dare let us down again."

Francis Sullivan concludes with a description of a kind of pilgrimage he made, after the Commission concluded, along the Camino Walk to the Santiago Cathedral in Spain. A Catholic himself, he decided to take with him a copy of the published report of the Commission which documented more than 5000 instances of child abuse. He describes dodging the church security and hurling it into a Cathedral crypt so it landed face up among the ecclesiastical bones. It was a startling gesture of protest and admonition, but also of atonement.

It is an unexpected prologue to the concert and it enhances what is to follow. The Psalms sung in Latin, English and German have been framed by a reminder of the Christian values of conscience and justice for others, not a preoccupation with the piety of the self. It invigorates the Psalms with purpose and duty of a more immediate kind.

The twelve psalms chosen range from the 16th century to the present. It is Thomas Arne's (1710-1778) sprightly setting for *Psalm 2* which opens the event. Under conductor, Antony Pitts, The Song Company, founded in 1984 and based in Sydney, immediately captivates the full and appreciative pews at Pilgrim Church. With twelve members – six women, six men – they quickly confirm the view that this is the country's pre-eminent choir and *a capella* ensemble.

Psalm 45 by Francisco Valls (1665-1747) sung in Latin by six of the company, is as glorious as it is brief, while young 33 year old composer, William Knight's rendering of *Psalm 21* - "He asked You for life/ and you gave it to him" is majestic.

There are two works in German, late 19th century composer Felix Draeseke's *Psalm 93- Der Herr ist Konig* and 18th century musician Johann Heinrich Rolle's *Psalm 97*. The full choir performs the brief and lovely fragment from William Byrd (1543-1623) from *Psalm 94*. Translated from the Latin it reads: "O Lord, according to the multitude of sorrows in my heart/Thy consolations have made my soul joyful."

A highlight is *Psalm 96, A new song*, by James McMillan (b. 1959) featuring male voices only and concluding with a triumphant organ solo from Anthony Hunt. The final items – from the 18th century, William Boyce's *Psalm 99, The Lord is King*, *be the people never so impatient* and the Robert White (1538-1574) setting in Latin of *Psalm 20*, reveal the strength and beauty of The Song Company's prodigious vocal talents - the final "amen" enthralling even the non-religious in the audience, even the lost and gone before.

It has been a splendid recital. My only regret is that I witnessed only one of twelve in this magnificent project.

Adelaide Festival - Eight

Published: 2020-03-05 *Adelaide Festival · Music*

Eight by Michael van der Aa. Featuring Kate Miller-Heidke, Livia van den Bercken, Vakil Eelman Hetzel Lecture Theatre, Institute Building State Library of South Australia. February 27. Until March 15.

When we talk about immersive experience increasingly we mean Virtual Reality. VR is not only the newest frontier, it the most mind-bending kingdom of them all. Netherlands composer and director, Michael van der Aa has gained prominence for his progress in merging music and visual experience to create art works that go beyond tentative gimmickry.

Eight, his fifteen minute VR composition, featuring Australian singer Kate Miller-Heidke, premiered at the Aix-en-Provence festival in July last year. Van der Aa describes the work as "An audiovisual poem- The life of a woman, a stream of memories, a journey through time." It has music specifically composed for the VR format and is a collaboration with VR set designer Theun Mosk and, pioneers of the format, The Virtual Dutch Men.

The Hetzel Lecture Theatre, in the heritage Institute Building of the State Library, is an unlikely place to find futuristic music technology. But at the desk a person is waiting to usher me into the mysteries of VR. The starting times are staggered so we enter the event one person at a time.

There are safety questions about health conditions – cardiac, hearing issues, epilepsy, for instance. And phobias. Claustrophobia and vertigo. I nod and try to look sanguine, then sit and wait a while.

The next stage is through the dark curtain to the waiting room. It is quiet and dimly lit. Another person is standing in front of a console. I am given a laminated sheet with song lyrics on it. I read it several times but not much of it sinks in. Maybe I am still wondering about the safety questions. The words – "*I sigh/ I hear time falling/ my breathing happens/- it's not mine*" – linger. As does – "*the silence of the house touches infinity*."

After what seems quite a long de-compression time. I am called to be fitted with stereo headphones and VR headset. I move the set so the vision is clear – the word Eight, like a dagger, appears before my eyes.

My instructions are to follow instructions. Do as the woman guiding me indicates. And, if I have any problems or concerns, raise both hands above my head and someone will come and attend to me.

As I step to the edge of the white path, it is all go. On each side of me is white elasticised curtaining but already my whole vision is taken over with an image, a hologram of Kate Miller-Heidke who is beckoning me to follow. Already my headphones are filled with sepulchral music. It is Kate's bell-like mezzo-soprano voice.

The song is *Mirrors at Night* with choral harmonies from The Netherlands Chamber Choir and minimal instrumentation - so appealing that I later went straight to iTunes to buy the album, *Time Falling,* which has only just been released.

But at the time I am too busy concentrating on staying in spatial relation with my guide. Several times I turn and seem to move straight through her arm. I don't feel entirely steady and I know I can't lean against the soft walls of this cocoon I'm in.

The corridor we are moving along seems all fine and the music is starting to register. "*There's something flowing/ that I can't grasp/ A man on a terrace/ accidentally falls*." I have no idea what the relation between these words and the sudden changing of the VR landscape is, but it is definitely a portent .

Then I step out into a vast open space. It is like stepping into all of Finland. Or a trippy version of Yellowstone National Park. There are huge dark trees, rocky outcrops, and, as I look out, I realise that I am looking into a canyon. I've lost track of my guide. There is a safety rail ahead of me but it melts in my hand. The path I'm on looks like the size of a bath mat. I am standing with my arms wrapped around myself trying not to topple. It is an amazing vista and impressively real, but all I can think about is not being that man on the terrace – accidentally falling.

I feel like Wile E Coyote on a mesa, a thousand metres above the ground, with a rope and an Acme anvil under my arm and any minute the Road Runner is going to honk me and gravity will take me down to that inevitable puff of dust and disintegration.

As I recall (no reviewer's notes are possible in VR) the images then change to huge rolling asteroids and a yawning chasm of even more intergalactic proportions. That too fades and I am being beckoned by Kate again - and moved into an area which, at least, seems like it has a sensible-sized floor.

There is a table with a cloth over it like a curtain. Under the table is a young girl signalling me to sit with her while she sings another *Time Falling* song – *Identical Hands*. It's good to lower my centre of gravity but my level of apprehension is too high to stay in the moment.

The next audiovisual torment is a blizzard of red stars which expands into another vertiginous revelation. There is another sheer drop and the swirling red particles seem to be inviting me straight over the edge. I think about raising my arms in the air and then decide not to. I probably stood stock still for less than a minute but it seems like infinity. Frozen to the spot, not moving a muscle, not even a chromosone. So I don't fall a thousand metres into the Earth's core in the Hetzel Lecture Theatre.

From there, Kate returns one last time - and then an actual human tells me to come to the end of the lit path and my apparatus will be removed. I hand back my headphones and VR set and try very hard not to kiss the ground.

The final lines of the song I have just heard are loaded with irony when I read them again days later. "*Turn backward/ turn backward/ From the silence, the hollow, the untrue/ once again/ We are in no particular point in time.*"

Eight is an extraordinary experience, visually and musically, but for me an unnerving one. The components of the narrative – the woman moving back from age to childhood – are lost in sheer alarm at falling into the VR abyss. I should have paid closer attention to the fine print. Extreme vertigo. I think that's me.

Eight - FOUR stars

Your Correspondent- No Stars whatsoever.

Adelaide Festival - Morbid pleasures within theatrical invention

Published: 2020-03-10 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Cold Blood by Thomas Gunzig. Michele Anne De Mey, Jaco Van Dormael, Kiss & Cry Collective. Ridley Centre, Adelaide Showgrounds. March 5. Duration: 1 hour 15 mins (no interval)

Mouthpiece by Kieran Hurley Traverse Theatre Company Odeon Theatre. March 6. Bookings: adelaidefestival.com.au Tickets: $30 - $69. Duration 1 hour 35 minutes (no interval) Until March 15.

The Belgian Kiss & Cry Collective, led by choreographer Michele Anne de Mey and filmmaker Jaco Van Dormael have turned *Cold Blood* into a "nano-dance" spectacle. It is forensic, funny, romantic and macabre - and presents aspects of death you usually can't put your finger on.

Surrounded by cameras, small scale props, miniature cityscapes, and numerous lighting effects, the team of performers, in full view, re-enact seven sudden, untimely, even stupid, deaths and the final moments of consciousness.

An accidental death in a car wash shows the vehicle enveloped in soapy blood – the image projected by live video feed to the large screen. There are dance routines performed by pairs of fingers, tap dancing in thimbles. The digital choreography is dazzling as are the art deco sets screened in silent screen monochrome. The ungainly human hand is transformed in close up, making twirling palms and nimble fingers inexplicably, often kaleidoscopically, expressive.

The action – whether a 1940s bombing raid, a Busby Berkeley swimming ballet, or a space rocket launch – is bathed in evocative music. Operatic arias, Nina Simone, Bowie's *Space Oddity* – all combine to make this seemingly effortless theatrical invention a delightful if, sometimes, morbid pleasure.

Mouthpiece is a small play with plenty to say and asks timely questions about who gets speak. Scottish playwright Kieran Hurley's intricately constructed two-hander begins with a chance meeting on the Salisbury Crags above Edinburgh. Libby (Shauna Macdonald) a forty-something struggling writer, is standing on the precipice poised to jump. Declan (Angus Taylor), sixteen and unemployed, steps in and drags her back from the brink.

From there the narratives of the two characters interweave to the point of transference. Recognising Declan's artistic talent (he gives her a drawing of a giant orb he calls *Mouthpiece*) Libby takes him to the Scottish Museum of Modern Art where he revels in the "big mad mental mouths" of Francis Bacon paintings.

But the Pygmalion fantasy turns sinister when Libby records his life story. This becomes the basis for a comeback play she also calls *Mouthpiece* – "speaking for generation austerity, a voice for the lost and the voiceless." Declan's indignant response is clear – "you have stolen my life."

Traverse director, Orla O'Loughlin keeps the tension high and the story and meta-narrative lucid. Kai Fischer's deft lighting and simple three tiered set work well, as does the projected text.

The actors are excellent. Shauna Macdonald's Libby is a study of lost purpose and desperate opportunism. As Declan, Angus Taylor memorably captures the anguish of a working class teenager whose eloquence is pre-empted and appropriated. *Mouthpiece* is a festival highlight.

" Morbid pleasures within theatrical invention" *The Australian*, March 10, 2020, p.14.

Reviewing the Adelaide Festival : Recollections in Grateful Tranquil-ity

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File under Archive, Current, Festival, Commentary.

Adelaide Festival

Reviewing the Adelaide Festival : Recollections in Grateful Tranquility. Murray Bramwell

My life in Adelaide has always included the Festival. Less than a month after I arrived, in February 1972, to begin postgraduate study at Flinders Uni, I was in the thick of Writers' Week. Beat legends Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Allen Ginsberg were reading in the Town Hall. Ginsberg had invited Indulkana songmen from APY lands to share the stage for a marathon of poetry, chanting and dance. The charismatic Russian Vosnesensky also held court. Scott Hicks was everywhere recording it on reel-to-reel tape.

Over the next twelve years I sampled the festival but on a meagre budget. In 1976, in one of Anthony Steel's elegantly curated programs, I saw and heard the music and silences of John Cage and the lithe choreography of Merce Cunningham. In the Space the revolutionary South African writer, Athol Fugard's *Sizwe Banzi is Dead* and *The Island* played back to back to audiences stunned by their courageous witness.

But there were many misses. My all-time Festival regrets are not seeing cricot2's *The Dead Class* in '78, and Pina Bausch in 1982, even if I did see pianist Keith Jarrett perform his alchemy and attended the Edward Hopper exhibition at the Art Gallery.

In 1980 came the first of many transformative theatre experiences. At the Anstey Hill Quarry, Peter Brook's *The Conference of Birds* and *The Ik* (alas, not *Pere Ubu*) became touchstones for future expectations. Seeing the invention and intensity of his actors was to see Brook's Empty Space come alive. This was when the Festival began to be my theatrical education, opening my imaginative horizons – something which has continued to this day.

My connection to the Adelaide Festival changed and intensified in 1986. In that year I began reviewing professionally for *The National Times*, *The Advertiser,* and within the next two years, *The Adelaide Review* and *Theatre Australia,* then, later again*, The Australian*. Now I had access to the full range that the festival offered . I interviewed Elizabeth Le Compte of The Wooster Group and I went out to Thebarton Theatre to see the intriguing Jan Fabre.

The amazing Rustaveli Company from Georgia, led by maestro Ramaz Chkhikvadze, re-energised Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and turned *Richard III* into a reptilian pantomime, heralded by lashes of electric guitar and thumping bass. Ramaz was terrifying and plausible, channelling, it seemed, both Stalin and Batman's Joker.

Then there were Beckett performances by Billie Whitelaw and the engaging spiel of Spalding Gray. And, following Tenkei Gekijo's butoh masterpiece, *Mizu no Eki* (*The Water Station)* in 1984, came the unearthly Kazuo Ohno. 1984 had been a vexed festival with director Elisha Moshinsky's abrupt resignation, but again it was Anthony Steel who stepped in and steadied the ship and 1986, my first full festival, was one of Steel's finest – including also the premiere of the Richard Meale's opera of Patrick White's *Voss*, the Nederlands Dans Theater, Philip Glass, and the newly-emerging Laurie Anderson.

The Australian Bicentennial celebrations boosted the resources of the Festival in 1988 and Lord Harewood's program (assisted by Rob Brookman) was ambitious. The all-night performance of Peter Brook's version of the Indian epic, *The Mahabharata* was the much-feted highlight. Brook's return to the Anstey Hill Quarry, eight years after *The Conference of Birds* piqued our interest. *The Mahabharata* proved splendid, but unevenly so, and at 3.30 am, when the chocolate rations and brandy ran low and fatigue ran high, it seemed like the dawn-lit triumphant finale was a long way off.

The Harewood festival had some grand inclusions - the entire Chicago Symphony performed, the Moscow Circus came to town, Twyla Tharp danced, and we saw more Japanese butoh, this time the celebrated Sankai Juku. The State Theatre Company commission, *1841* by Michael Gow was deemed by many to be overcooked and underdone and disappointment turned too readily to critical hostility, from me included, I regret to say.

The theatrical highlight of 1988 (thanks Rob Brookman for the tip) was French Canadian company, Theatre Repere's *The Dragons Trilogy,* an epic work set in Toronto from the 19th century to the present. Its then less well-known, director Robert Lepage was to become a fixture at the festival, returning with his Ex-Machina company in 1998 to Robyn Archer's first festival with *The Seven Streams of the River Ota*, again for David Sefton in 2014 with *Needles and Opium,* and most recently for Neil Armfield and Rachel Healey in 2018 with *The Far Side of the Moon.*

Christopher Hunt, director for two festivals in 1980 and 1994, has had a sometimes uneasy relationship with Adelaide and his reticence to engage publicly meant that his programs were not spruiked as much as they deserved. Undoubtedly he produced the goods. Brook at the Anstey Hill Quarry in 1980 was bold and innovative, and in 1994 his dance program alone was outstanding.

Hunt himself was rarely seen about the festival but when Mark Morris and his dancers set up shop at the café tables next to the Festival Centre there was a rare chance for us to meet and greet performers with the kind informality that makes a festival truly festive. The excellent Frankfurt Ballet also performed and William Yang introduced his, now classic, one man slideshow, *Sadness,* both gay celebration and sombre elegy to the AIDS crisis of the 1980s and early 90s.

The Open Roof mini-festival was a detailed suite of Asian and Pacific performances presented in a purpose built wooden stage in Elder Park. It was ambitious, diverse and often esoteric and despite informative program notes and Hunt's commitment to take the festival into our geo-political region, it was not well supported. Relocated to the Plaza at Flinders Uni, the weather worn, wooden and thatched Open Roof remained a reminder of an idea that didn't quite fly.

In hindsight it is clear that this venture had already been more successfully prefigured in the quietly accomplished Rob Brookman's 1992 program with his inspired inclusion of musicians and dancers from Peter Gabriel's UK WOMAD festival. The experience of Sheila Chandra, Youssou N'Dour , Remmy Ongala, Subramanium and Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan performing both traditional and electro-fusion music is something those of us lucky to attend the first WOMADelaide still enthuse about.

The extraordinary success of WOMAD- prosaically short for World of Music and Dance – begun by Brookman, Ian Scobie and others, in conjunction with Thomas Brooman in the UK, is evident today as this, now fully separate, annual event remains a central and much-loved part of the Adelaide Festival program today.

Festivals invariably reveal the predilictions, but also the personalities of the artistic director. Anthony Steel was like an affable doge, his rigour and flair contributed more to the continuing reputation of the festival than any other single programmer. Later appointments brought other energies.

When Barrie Kosky was named for 1996 there were murmurings that it wasn't yet his turn, but the result vindicated his surprise selection. Kosky's program, which he enthusiastically narrated at his famous Hills Hoist launch was full of buzz. The Spanish iconoclasm of La Fura del Baus, the visually brilliant Hotel Pro Forma, the timely sexual politics of DV8's *Enter Achilles*, and the Maly Theatre of St Petersburg (along with the three week party at Red Square) brought a renewed vibrancy to the Festival.

Kosky was visible on the ground in the long lead up to March and he was the program's number one fan. The Maly Company and the Slovenian dancers, Betontanc continued the trend of scheduling theatre from the former Soviet Bloc throughout the 1990s – The Georgian Film Actors Studio, the Katona Joszef Theater, all linking with the Rustavelis before that.

For me, these threads in programming – Brook, Lepage, the Eastern Europeans, Japanese butoh and avant garde circus from Circus Oz to the chainsaw-juggling French punk clowns, Archaos – were a continuing revelation. As were the contributions from local companies such as ADT, Red Shed, Doppio, Brink and The Border Project; the Festival has been an important commissioning source for new works. It enlarged my range as a reviewer and enriched my teaching in drama at Flinders.

Robyn Archer, one of Adelaide's own, delivered two excellent festivals, strengthened by her own aesthetic clarity and erudition, and made confident by her understanding of the festival's founding principles. Her selections were shrewd and thematically intricate, bringing Peter Greenaway's opera *Writing to Vermeer* and *Mizumachi (The Water City)* as well as rich and diverse music.

The micro-kerfuffle about the festival poster, featuring the Virgin Mary playing an accordion, reminded us that the festival has its unpredictable parochial moments, but it was settled again soon enough – each accordion to their needs.

The Peter Sellars Experience was a more complicated matter, and its poster controversy was minor compared with the larger structural issues. I still remember my excitement when it was first announced that the successor to Robyn Archer in 2002 would be Peter Sellars, originator with the brilliant composer John Adams, of the operatic masterwork *Nixon in China* (a highlight of Rob Brookman's festival in 1992 when it was directed by Gale Edwards)

Sellars made several visits to Adelaide prior to the scheduled start to the 2002 event and, as he featured in the second year postmodern theatre topic I taught at Flinders Uni, I invited him to come and speak to my students - which he very generously did. He visited my classes several times and was exhilarating to see and hear. In his signature kaftans and prayer beads, his spiky hair like the touchpaper on a penny skyrocket, he embraced all he met and responded to questions with warmth and earnest, interested attention.

Sellars' commitment to art and culture, to the value and impact of theatre in all forms, was undeniable and, to a variety of audiences it was inspirational. He wore his feelings and ideals close to the surface and people responded. I chaired a session he gave at the Festival of Ideas and, sitting on the Elder Hall stage with him, I could see how engaged and exuberant and intent the packed house was.

After he gave the annual Investigator Lecture for Flinders University in the Town Hall, the Vice-Chancellor appointed Sellars as an Adjunct Professor. He ran seminars at the university and in true professorial fashion accidentally left a folder of students' essays at an airport in Sweden.

In the eighteen months leading up to his role as AD of the Festival in 2002, the very amiable Peter Sellars had proven to be an outstanding and unforgettable Festival Artist in Residence. But even as he was energising the Adelaide arts community the problems became apparent. As director he was delegating the task of running the Festival to others with no authority or financial clout to succeed.

He was a brilliant instigator and narrator for the Festival but just as he was making himself invaluable, he was also in the process of disappearing - right when the real operational logistics began. The 2002 experience was a folly but not a catastrophe: Sue Natrass expertly took over the management and we learned an enduring lesson about what is immutable about our festival and why it has endured so long.

The Festival in the 21st century has continued to thrive. And my abiding sense of it is still based around events and performances I have written about that comprise nearly forty years of epiphanies. Such as David Gulpilil's extraordinary solo performance in Stephen Page's program, *Nora*, the Berlin Schaubuhne's innovative adaptation of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* which Brett Sheehy presented in 2006, and John Adams's Kerouac tribute *Dharma at Big Sur* two years later. Paul Grabowsky's selections – *The Sound and the Fury,* performed by Elevator Repair Service, and Jonathan Pryce's unnerving performance in Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker* - also stand out.

Most recently, the four festivals from David Sefton, ushering in the even more demanding annual cycle for the event, have produced outstanding music and theatre. The residencies by John Zorn, (assisted by a Who's Who of contemporary post-rock and jazz performers) and the recitals by Gavin Bryars and his collaborators were exceptional. As was the theatre – Ivo van Hove's masterwork *Roman Tragedies* (along with *Kings of War* in Armfield and Healy's 2018 line-up) and Rona Munro's *The James Plays*, were works of scale and ambition that are still rare and special to see outside of Europe.

The current leadership from Neil Armfield and Rachel Healy has been successful. Both directors have strong connections with Adelaide and made significant early advances in their distinguished careers here. Decisions have been made with a sense of precedent with locations – *The Secret River,* vividly staged at Anstey Hill Quarry, is an obvious example. The presentation of two Barrie Kosky operas – *The Magic Flute* and the extraordinary *Saul*- is another. Also selections such as the Iranian Verbatim Theatre Group's confronting *Manus* and the South African music theatre work, *A Man of Good Hope* signal a continuation in the Festival's social and political concerns. The inclusion of *human requiem,* Rundfunkchor Berlin's promenade version of Brahms' *Requiem*, is another enduring highlight in my long list.

Reviewing is a strange activity. Often it can seem like stringing beads - commenting and musing on the passing parade, then moving on to the next item. A celebration of the Adelaide Festival, such as this publication, reminds me what a complex and magnifying effect it has had for me - attending this recurring but ever-evolving, event, in my own city, over so many years. It is a rare privilege this opportunity, it has been a master class in new creative ideas, and provided the most amazing window on the world.

Published in slightly edited form in :

Adelaide Festival 60 Years (1960-2020), Edited by Catherine McKinnon, Wakefield Press, 2020, pp. 226-230.

Adelaide Fringe - Truckload of Sky - The Lost Songs of David McComb

Published: 2020-03-18 *Adelaide Fringe · Music*

Truckload of Sky - The Lost Songs of David McComb The Friends of David McComb Level 5, Union House, The University of Adelaide. RCC . March 12.

Formed in Perth in 1978, after morphing from a band called Dalsy and (name-for-a-day) Logic, The Triffids produced five studio albums, six EPs, six live recordings/ compilations and nine legendary cassettes including *Dungeon* and *Son*. Singles such as *Wide Open Road* and *Bury Me Deep in Love* became etched in the Australian national songbook, but although indie favourites, the Triffids never really had their day.

When they went to the UK in 1984, by January of the next year the cover of the influential New Musical Express proclaimed –"The Year of The Triffids." But somehow fate threw saltwater on their fortunes, and like NZ band The Mutton Birds, despite critical enthusiasm, the wider following failed to materialise. By 1989, this excellent band, led by an extraordinarily talented singer songwriter, had called it quits.

As time passes, the life and works of David McComb only seem more remarkable. Prolific, distinctive, and startlingly assured, McComb conjured haunting, memorable lyrics and found riffs, hooks, bridges and choruses that fitted like melodic gloves. He had written hundreds of songs by the time of his tragic and early death, at 36 in 1999. We can only wonder at what might have been. Even now, his output is only surpassed by Paul Kelly and Nick Cave, two celebrated survivors of the same years of living dangerously.

The Friends of David McComb is a fine name for a terrific project.

Comprising fellow Triffids – his younger brother, Rob McComb, pedal steel wiz Graham Lee, and bassist Phil Kakulas- as well as Blackeyed Susans lead singer, Rob Snarski and guitarist JP Shilo, drummer Clare Moore (Moodists and Dave Graney Band) keyboard maestro Bruce Haymes and vocalist Alex Gow, their performance at RCC's Level 5 is the first live outing of an album of Lost Songs released only this month.

Truckload of Sky is a collection of songs from the trove of McComb's unreleased material. It is a rich find, and nothing like the usual bottom-drawer out-takes that get added to the legacy of many musicians. This is top-drawer stuff and, at last, we are getting to hear it.

On stage to sing the first cluster is Rob Snarski, said to be McComb's favourite singer, for whom he wrote *Ocean of You*. Snarski's fine baritone and phrasing captures it – "I'm out of my depth in an ocean of you." Haymes' piano tracks the vocal, along with Lee on pedal steel. *Kiss Him (He's History)* is McComb at his ironic poignant best and Snarski delivers. These songs are like revelations, overdue to be heard.

Second Nature also has a melancholy tinged with spite – "It's second nature to hurt someone/ Simplest thing is to treat them like dirt/ Comes in the blood it's in the water supply/ Second nature second nature to hurt." These are not moon-and-june lyrics or panegyrics to a sunburnt country. This Australia is mean and unexamined. *Wake in Fright* with an unsettlingly jaunty country twang.

For *Make Believe We're not here in Hell* (McComb's titles sound like Tennessee Williams) the singer is Alex Gow (it's Romy Vega on the CD) accompanied by the steadfast bass of Phil Kakulas, Clare Moore's slow march drum and Graham Lee on heartbreak pedal steel. Gow also croons through *Look Out for Yourself* (nobody else will) a slow blues inhabiting that wry McComb space that is neither self pity or bravado. The band are getting into stride – Rob McComb moving between violin and a Gretsch with a tasty effects switch, JP Shilo up the back on lead guitar and Haymes finding just the right fills and harmonies. *Kneel so Low* is another sardonic uncovered treasure and Gow completes his excellent stint with a Triffids fave - *No Desire*.

Peerlessly accompanied only by Haymes and Lee, Snarski returns with *This One Eats Souls* – with its haunted lyric it is one of McComb's finest songs and Snarski, singer for the erstwhile Blackeyed Susans, captures it better than ever. It is a highlight among many. Snarski follows with a more upbeat Christmas song – *I've Heard Things Turn Out this Way*.

Singer guitarist JP Shilo brings some grunt to *Don't Call Yourself an Angel* and then – who knew the bleak irony of the week to follow? – *This Whole World's About to Slide* with its fearful lyric – "Growing something strange in the back of my eye/ Have to hold me down / with a truckload of sky/This whole world's about to slide / Yeah this whole world's about to slide." *Enemy Mine* and *Lucky for Some* close JP's set and Snarski duets with Lenore Stephens in the otherworldly *Somewhere in the Shadows*.

It has been a full set – twenty songs, some favourites, most brand new to all of us at Level 5. The Friends finish loud and strong for *Raining Pleasure, Unmade Bed* and (with a lyric worthy of John Donne) *A Trick of the Light*. It has been a celebration of fine music but it is elegiac as well. These musicians knew and worked with David McComb. One of them is his brother. Twenty years have passed but his presence is everywhere. It is not a trick of the light, and it brings a truckload of sky.

Postscript. This concert was to be the first of a tour of Melbourne, Brisbane, Sydney and Fremantle in April and May. With the Covid19 crisis some of these are certainly cancelled, others doubtful. I hope, like everything else, that this is only temporary.

Murray Bramwell

Fringe review: Sea Wall

Published: 2021-02-16 *Adelaide Fringe · Theatre*

Adelaide Fringe Murray Bramwell

A sea wall is a massive, unexpected chasm under the ocean often deceptively near the shore. In this tightly-scripted monologue, husband and father, Alex (splendidly played by Renato Musolino) explores his own dark abyss after a sudden, freakish accident.

***** Five stars

Asked at short notice in 2008 to write a play for the Bush Theatre in London, Simon Stephens came up with *Sea Wall*. "I wanted to write a monologue," he said. "I wanted to write about a sudden (event). I wanted to write about fathering a daughter. I wanted to write about my increasing atheism."

He wrote with the actor Andrew Scott (*Sherlock, Fleabag*) in mind, and it was a hit. It is a small play – barely more than forty minutes duration. It is full of tiny particulars and yet, just beyond that, its themes are unfathomably large and cosmic. It is like the sea wall itself.

Alex is a young-ish man who is living the London life. He has a beautiful wife Helen, an adorable daughter Lucy, and he makes good money taking photographs for British Home Stores catalogues. He and his family visit Helen's father Arthur in the South of France. These idyllic holidays complete their fortunate, almost complacent, life. It is during one of these glittering aquatic days that his world is flipped over, irrevocably, into darkness and remorse.

Flying Penguin Productions director, David Mealor has remounted his 2018 production of *Sea Wall* and it is more assured than ever. With the same creative team, every facet is unified into an outstanding theatrical experience. Kathryn Sproul's minimal set featuring a grey wall like a standing stone (and a chair for the actor) is expansively - then sparsely - lit by Chris Petridis, as the narration veers between elation and despair. Quincy Grant's almost subliminal score interweaves trickling solo piano and occasional strings with rhythmic tides and a child's humming.

As Alex, Renato Musolino is outstanding. Sometimes self-satisfied, at others, naïve and vulnerable, his monologue leaps from quirky domestic details to Meaning-of-Life pondering. Stephens revels in making his text a wonky blend of Stephen Curtis and Jean Paul Sartre. Musolino embraces and expertly manages these disparate elements, as Mealor does with the production as a whole. And Musolino's final ten minutes are pin-drop galvanising.

Sea Wall marks a terrific beginning for theatre in this year's Fringe. In these difficult COVID times it is especially gratifying to find excellence so close to home.

Sea Wall is playing at the Space Theatre, Adelaide Festival Centre until Sunday, February 21.

InDaily review published February 17, 2021.

Fringe review: DIRT

Published: 2021-02-18 *Adelaide Fringe · Theatre*

Adelaide Fringe Murray Bramwell

An Australian journalist is in Moscow to secretly investigate evidence of LGBTIQ persecution. He meets a Russian tourist guide who can help but he has his own agenda. Angus Cameron's wryly engaging thriller takes us through a labyrinth of misrepresentation.

****1/2 Four and a Half Stars

DIRT is an intriguing play which combines serious human rights themes with an almost mischievous sense of shape-shifting plot surprise – making it all the more appealing.

An earnest young Australian (later we discover his name is Colin) is hanging back after a Moscow tour to talk with the guide. The sardonic young Russian (whose name we never quite verify) banters with him, teasing him about his girlfriend, defending Russian politics and making barbed remarks about Australian immigration detention failures. It is an edgy exchange but flirtatious as well; a dangerous dance in a city where being queer is a risk to one's safety.

They venture out together. To the Russian's apartment for vodkas and then clubbing on party drugs. Colin is wanting the Russian to speak on camera about LGBTIQ persecution in Russia and Chechnya. They disclose a little about their lives. Growing up gay in Tasmania for instance, and the Russian reluctantly talks about his sister, a lesbian who was betrayed by his uncle and is now missing.

Things shift when Colin, loaded on GHB, passes out and revives to find himself tied up and interrogated by the Russian, calling himself Nicolai, and demanding information about his film crew associates.

Tautly directed by Bronwen Coleman, with buzzy lighting from Matt Ralph and roiling dance beats courtesy of DJ MzRizk, *DIRT* is an engaging mix of ethical debate and espionage mystery. It questions the right of outsiders to expect citizens to endanger their lives speaking out on issues. It also considers the depths of nationalistic feeling even in corrupt regimes. But in Angus Cameron's accomplished text these threads of argument belong in the larger context of a gay love story.

The performances are excellent. Patrick Livesey's Russian is an astute mix of swagger and introspection and his accent has no trace of parody or cliché. As the persistent but unworldly Colin, Wil King is a convincing foil to Livesey – and both have Angus Cameron's effortless dialogue and characterisation to support and propel them.

Here again, so early into the 2021 Fringe, is a premiere local play of real merit. Patrick Livesey has noted that there aren't many texts available for young queer actors. What a terrific idea to go out and make a new one for themselves.

DIRT is playing at Holden Street Theatres until March 21.

InReview published 18 February, 2021.

Fringe review: That Boy

Published: 2021-02-18 *Adelaide Fringe · Theatre*

Adelaide Fringe Murray Bramwell

When, in pre-school child care, Tom pushes a little girl because he doesn't want to be hugged, he becomes the subject of an Incident Report. "He became That Boy," his mother recalls, "and I became That Mother." Writer and performer, Martha Lott powerfully describes the lonely challenges of parenting a turbulent child when everyone else has given up.

**** Four Stars

Sarah has two children – Hannah, and younger brother, Tom. One is easy-going and amenable. Tom, as his mother says, "is kind of like …the Energiser Bunny meets Tassie the Devil." She hastens to add - he is lovable and bright and loves to climb. On roofs and windmills and especially trees. In trees he feels safe when he is anxious. He also feels safe (and emotionally forthcoming) when he has his plush toy Monkey close by.

Many families deal with such behaviour management issues and struggle to keep on top of things. Sarah takes Tom to doctors for testing and assessments. But he is not declared "on the spectrum" or given any definitive diagnosis. By some grimly absurd logic that makes him normal and therefore ineligible for funded support.

In its premiere Fringe season at Holden Street Theatres, *That Boy* takes us into one crowded hour of Tom's life. It is a graphic and detailed account of the routines and strategies a solo mother uses to manage an unpredictable child.

The staging is as simple as it is compelling. Meg Wilson's raised platform set (warmly lit by Jordan Scheer) presents the complete chaos of a child's bedroom in all its multicoloured detail. Two model palm trees stand by the bed, stacks of bright red storage boxes, toys, games and discarded clothes cover the entire floor. A large Lego mat barely contains the bits and odds and ends of a profusion of playthings.

Director Yasmin Gurreeboo keeps the narrative close in and the emotion intense, but measured – making the mother's anguish the more poignant. Sascha Budimski's sound design subtly underscores the action.

It is then the task of Martha Lott to bring this story of love, desperation and persistence into sharp relief. For the full duration of the monologue, Lott's Sarah is doing what all mothers (and many Dads) do. She is tidying Tom's room as if to re-order his life. Putting things back where they belong, folding clothes, repacking games, reorganising toys and endlessly raking up Lego.

This play covers difficult issues of parental resentment and guilt, of social ostracism, self-harm and suicidal impulse. Martha Lott's excellent performance - as Sarah steadily coaches herself to be positive, constant and hopeful, is startling in its directness and quiet despair. It is a portrait of courage and devotion, and a lesson in how to tidy a room in 58 minutes.

That Boy is playing at Holden Street Theatres until March 21.

InReview published 18 February, 2021.

Fringe review: The Twins

Published: 2021-02-18 *Adelaide Fringe · Theatre*

Adelaide Fringe Murray Bramwell

Two friends are cast in a school production of *The Comedy of Errors*. At Geelong Grammar, no less. One is Greg Fleet, the other Ian Darling. One took the high road, the other the low. Forty years later they ponder where life has taken them - and which road was which.

**** Four Stars

The Twins, we are told, is Truer than Fiction. Terry Serio the director describes it as Theatre Verite. Whatever it is, it is a strange version of Truth or Dare. Joined by plot contrivance in a school production of *The Comedy of Errors*, Greg Fleet and Ian Darling are the Antipholi – one, Antipholus of Ephesus, the other, Antipholus of Syracuse. It was the making of their friendship – and their lifelong link to the theatre, also perhaps a metaphor for their enduring sense of mistaken identity.

The premise of this show, which premieres at the Adelaide Fringe before going on to stints in Sydney and Melbourne, is that Fleet and Darling talk about their beginnings, their middles, and, if not their ends, their future intentions.

They sit at a table and return to the script. The Comedy and the Errors. Of which there is plenty of both. As they reminisce about their English class from 1977 or so, with formative texts such as *The Removalists* and Peter Brook's *The Empty Space*, they also intersperse rather wincing bursts of the theme tune from *The Patty Duke Show* – another case of displaced twins.

Lurking among all this is a sense of discomfort about …Privilege. I am a white man, Fleet intones at the beginning. I am a rich white man, Darling is required to add. But as they remind us, they are narrating their story as it happened, warts, diamonds and all. Yes, Greg Fleet went to Geelong Grammar – on a scholarship. And Ian Darling and his class were told to be nice to Fleety because his father has recently committed suicide. Ian Darling, meanwhile is descended from a wealthy grain dynasty. His family lived in Toorak and his father was a financier.

Which was why when he and Fleet were planning to audition for NIDA to study acting, Darling backed out because he felt duty bound to become a stockbroker to please his paterfamilias. It would be many years before he took up his vocation as a documentary film- maker and philanthropist.

As for Fleet, the renowned stand-up comedian, he was accepted into NIDA but later expelled because of his heroin problems - about which much is said during the course of the show.

There is something both fascinating and perilous about *The Twins*. It is confessional, awkward, sometimes mawkish. They talk incessantly about themselves, their doubts, their shame, their small-minded self-concerns. They sing raucously to 70s tunes and declaim chunks of Shakespeare

At times we are watching a private conversation getting out of hand and we don't quite know where to look. But it is intrepid in its candour – and remarkable in the depth and constancy of their friendship.

The Twins is above all about two long-standing pals whose paths have diverged so much that they ought to be total strangers. But here they are, like the latest version of 49 Up, confirming their affection like Estragon and Vladimir, returned from Ephesus and Syracuse.

The Twins is playing at Holden Street Theatres until March 21.

InReview published 18 February, 2021.

Adelaide Festival 2021 - Robyn Nevin is outstanding

Published: 2021-02-23 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

A German Life by Christopher Hampton Co-produced by Adelaide Festival and The Gordon Frost Organisation. Dunstan Playhouse. Adelaide Festival Centre.

February 23. Tickets $ 30 - $109. Bookings: adelaidefestival.com.au. Duration: 1 hour 30 minutes. No interval. Until March 14.

"I have forgotten such a lot," concedes Brunhilde Pomsel, aged 102, "And then ...things surge up into my mind. Things I can remember in the minutest detail."

This happens when you get old, but in the case of Pomsel, the sweeping narrative of her long life includes her experiences at the epicentre of the German Third Reich. What she knows, and, perhaps, chooses to forget, still matters - and raises questions about the struggle between obedience and responsibility.

Interviewing her for an acclaimed Austrian documentary, entitled *A German Life*, the film-makers gathered 235 pages of transcription, much of which never made the cut. From that material, playwright Christopher Hampton assembled this compelling 90 minute monologue for the stage.

Like the clerical secretary, Traudi Junge, dutiful to Hitler even in the last days of the bunker (as depicted in the 2004 film, *Downfall*) Brunhilde Pomsel is a young, unworldly stenographer who ends up taking shorthand for Joseph Goebbels.

From the geriatric home where she lives, Pomsel describes her mid-teen life in pre-war Germany, then casually notes the rise of anti-semitism and Nazi dominance. But she also has a friend Eva, who is Jewish, and Pomsel works for Jewish employers. By 1933 she is employed at the Broadcasting Corporation and sees senior staff fired and sent to concentration camps.

Brunhilde is appalled watching Goebbels addressing a huge rally – 'This quiet, elegant man we saw in the office, transformed into a demented midget.' She sees things, but has no framework. Remorse breaks through when recalling the fate of the young martyr, Sophie Scholl, and Eva's disappearance to Auschwitz.

Neil Armfield's astutely understated production, premiering at the Adelaide Festival, is, as he says, "as much about our contemporary world as Hitler's Germany."

Dale Ferguson's set, a functional room in an aged care facility, is warmly lit by Nigel Levings. Alan John's introspective score (performed live by cellist, Catherine Finnis) combines with projected newsreel images of the Reich.

The extraordinary solo performance by Robyn Nevin brings Brunhilde fully into focus. In perfect accent, she captures her intelligence and ambition, but also her lack of agency as a young woman who, seated next to Goebbels at dinner, is utterly ignored by him. Nevin's vivid, unsentimental portrait of Pomsel in old age is splendidly managed.

The play asks us the perennial question. What would we do in the face of tyranny? At what point would we act ? As Brunhilde said in 2013- "People don't care. They watch all the dreadful things in Syria, then they switch off the TV and go out for dinner." *A German Life* is an uncomfortable challenge to our own time.

"Robyn Nevin is outstanding" *The Australian*. Online. February 24, 2021.

The Barefoot Review

Published: 2021-02-23 *WOMADelaide · Music*

WOMADelaide 2021: Re-inventing for the Pandemic

Murray Bramwell talks with Artistic Director, Ian Scobie about the challenges of planning a music festival during COVID.

The last time I interviewed Ian Scobie about WOMADelaide it was late January last year and Kangaroo Island was burning down. The bushfires -which engulfed huge sections of the country, sending serious smoke haze into the cities - were on everyone's mind. Scobie's company APA was running a national tour for the Italian composer, Ludovico Einaudi, who was due to perform at the Myer Music Bowl. It was uncertain to happen because of poor air conditions. Fortunately, the smoke dispersed and the concert went ahead.

But nothing matches 2021. As Scobie describes it :

"It's been very, very challenging really. I have to say that since working in Festivals-land since 1984, you come across the usual challenges – air traffic control for Peter Brook's *The Mahabharata* at the Quarry, or suddenly finding a tented venue has a third of the capacity it is supposed to have.

"But this is a whole kind of other degree of uncertainty – which, of course, the whole world is dealing with, it's not just poor us. It's the constant uncertainty that's so different. When we found out we couldn't get a permit to do the full scale event we had to ask ourselves – 'Do we do anything, or just cancel ?'

"The decision came very late in the year. We were meeting with SA Health in some detail from June 2020 onwards and we were backwards and forwards discussing ways of dealing with the situation and avoiding over-crowding. We were maintaining parallel programs - an international one if things got better, and then an Australian one. By late August we thought international was unlikely so by September it was going to be a program sourced within Australia. We had that arranged, with the diversity one would expect - culturally and musically.

"It was then not until the second week in October when, after more back and forth to SA Health, they said – 'Mmmm. No. We just think the combination of the duration, from noon to midnight, and the multi-stage format with audiences crossing over…' It wasn't something they were able to support.

"We just had to call it. So then we had to find out from SA Health what maximum event number we could have, and addressing their concerns meant we came to our decision – to have one stage, individual reserve seats, individual tickets not day passes. That meant contact tracing for Person X sitting in C 27 on Friday night or Saturday B 36. The QR app was not introduced yet. "

Scobie consulted with other event organisers such as the Adelaide Oval management –

"They were very helpful and keen to have us use their venue and it is a fabulous stadium. But it's an oval. It is not really part of the ethos of the WOMADelaide event. Which is how we ended up at King Rodney Park.

"Once we set parameters we had three days to get back to SA Health with a plan for six thousand seats, spaced in a version of checkerboard, a single fixed stage and operating hours confined from 6 pm to midnight. The duration of people's exposure is reduced and we know who and where they all are. "

At first Scobie considered using Elder Park but it was impossible to establish good sightlines for the size of the crowd. The same held for Botanic Park – the home of WOMADelaide since it began in 1992. Since it is a park full of trees there was nowhere that a seating rig could allow an unimpeded view for more than three thousand which, considering the overheads, was not financially viable. So Scobie and Mark Muller, the production manager, drove around the city looking for possible sites.

"We came across King Rodney Park – bounded by Dequetteville Terrace, Wakefield Road and Bartels Road. It contains an arena, has a fringe of trees, and parkland all around. So you have a sense of arrival and enclosure. It is the Christian Brothers College oval which is owned by the City of Adelaide and leased to the school. It is maintained for sport but open to the public. We have divided the area into zones – two thousand people through each of three gates, with six thousand the capacity. It will have a park feeling and we wanted a sense of enclosure. It will be a different concept but I did have one longtime WOMADelaide supporter say to me – 'I'm so looking forward to having a seat !' "

Scobie is pleased with the venue and the arrangements.

"I thought we had an obligation to run WOMAD in some form or other. I was opposed to presenting something like a single concert inside an auditorium that bore no resemblance to the event. I also had a concern that we needed to provide employment for the artists. Here we are in the middle of a pandemic and the arts are the first hit and the most heavily impacted – I think, even more than tourism."

The 2021 four night concert program, developed by Associate Director Annette Tripodi and her team, is the tip of an organisational planning iceberg that has been busy all year. The 25th WOMADelaide, in its 29th year and one of the city's most enduring events, will be remembered by the staff as a massive contingency exercise, a carefully constructed framework of events that could have been, but never happened. Scobie observes :

"Annette has done an amazing job. There is a full Australian program that's never seen the light of day – which would have been terrific. But planning like this may be the future. I do hope we are gong to have a full scale event in Botanic Park in 2022, whether it has an international component, who

knows ? Next year will be a bit of a Groundhog Day with the same uncertainties. We will plan parallel Australian and international programs and see how it goes. Ziggy Marley is keen to come, if we have internationals, he will be in it !"

The Friday night line-up opens, as WOMAD has done often before, with the participation of the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra. They will be ccompanying Lior, another festival favourite, in his performance of *Compassion*, a song cycle composed and conducted by Nigel Westlake. Commisssioned for the Sydney Symphony, *Compassion* incorporates texts and themes from both Islam and Judaism. Of the project Westlake has said - "We have tried to imbue the ancient texts with a contemporary interpretation, adhering to the purity of a single voice and orchestra. "

Also appearing is Archie Roach, whose classic album *Charcoal Lane* featured the anthem of the Stolen Generation, "Took the Children Away". His music has been re-released in recent years with the box set, *Creation*, and a remastered version of *Charcoal Lane*. His performance will be the first of many over four nights, highlighting indigenous culture and issues.

Completing the night's list is the excellent Sarah Blasko whose ARIA nomination and Triple J Album of the Year, *As Day Follows Night*, has celebrated its tenth anniversary with a re-issue plus bonus tracks. It sounds fresher than ever and her set will be a great note to close on.

Saturday night is an especially hot ticket and is already heavily subscribed. It opens with young Indigenous rappers MRLN x RKM (aka. Marlon Motlop and RullaKelly-Mansell) new talents sponsored by WOMADelaide and the NSS Academy.

Next is the near legendary Vika and Linda and their outstanding band, and we will be reminded what a strong repertoire they have gathered over a brilliant career. Their ample compilation album, *Akilotoa*, is impressive, not only for its range and appeal, but also because they are some of the finest interpreters of the songs of long-time collaborator, Paul Kelly.

Headliners on Saturday are Midnight Oil. As Ian Scobie observes:

"Midnight Oil have been regularly on our books and we check them out to ask –what are you doing this time ? They played WOMADelaide in 1997 and Peter Garrett has returned a couple of times to Planet Talks. He has fond memories of that particular gig. They also performed at WOMAD UK going back a way. So there's always been a connection. We had been talking for 18 months to two years out. They were planned for this year. Nobody thought it would be like this, but it was great to have it in prospect. People thinking – 'Oh God this is not a traditional WOMAD ! ' Instead, they see it's Midnight Oil and they are also doing their Makarrata Live project on the closing night."

Sunday night was scheduled to open with Zambian-born singer, Sampa the Great, but she cancelled all Australian commitments because she had travelled to Botswana and, due to COVID border restrictions, could not return. Instead, two emerging talents will perform. Pitjantjatjara/Torres Strait Islander artist , Miiesha, winner of a 2020 ARIA best Soul/R&B for her album *Nyaaringu*, will feature, along with PNG-born Melbourne artist, Kaiit, 2019 ARIA winner for her single "Miss Shiney".

The amazingly multi-talented Tash Sultana tops the card. Their debut album *Flow State*, double platinum single "Jungle" and the multi-platinum *Notion* EP have all been streamed hundreds of millions of times, some say up to a billion. Tash Sultana has a massive global following and they will also be featuring material from this month's release, *Terra Firma*.

Monday's program opens with Adelaide band Siberian Tiger, featuring Bree Tranter and Chris Panousakis, who released their EP *Last Dance* last year. They will also feature a string quartet. The Teskey Brothers – Josh and Sam - plus Brendon Love and Liam Gough formed in Melbourne in 2008. Since then they have added keyboards and horns and have begun the most sought-after soul/blues live act in the country. Their excellent album, *Run Home Slow* won ARIA for Best Blues/Roots album. Last year's release, *Live at the Forum* is a glimpse of their presence on stage. Their show will be quite something.

And to close this one-of-a-kind WOMADelaide, Midnight Oil will perform the world premier performance of *Makaratta Live*, a concert featuring prominent First Nations artists and raising public awareness of The Uluru Statement. The Oils will perform familiar hits connected to Indigenous Reconciliation as well new songs, "Gadigal Land", "Change the Date", and "Terror Australia". It will be a significant occasion – and a chance to affirm the values of the Uluru initiative which have been shamefully deflected and ignored by the present government.

After all the speculation and logistical modelling, Scobie is hoping that much of his team's time-consuming anticipatory work will not be necessary. There won't be interstate lock-downs, or last minute border closures, or quarantine emergencies. The artists will all arrive in time for COVID tests to be cleared, and hotel floors will be sealed off for their greater safety. But as Scobie acknowledges –

"It all rests with SA Health and their committee. Everyone is doing their best but no-one can give you a guarantee. Months ago a colleague said to me – 'Who knows? No-one. That's who !' "

So, says Ian Scobie with a wry smile, I keep saying – "It's going to be great. "

WOMADelaide 2021 Sunset Concert Series runs from March 5-8 at King Rodney Park , Wakefield Road, Adelaide.

The Barefoot Review, February 23, 2021.

Festival review : The Boy Who Talked to Dogs

Published: 2021-02-26 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Adelaide Festival 2021

Slingsby takes Martin McKenna's memoir *The Boy Who Talked to Dogs* back to County Limerick where it began. Featuring an Irish pub band, shadow dog puppets and Bryan Burroughs, brilliant as the talking boy.

"Sometimes you have to learn to be the hero of your own story," writer Amy Conroy observed - and this is what the celebrated dog whisperer, Martin McKenna achieved. Or mostly so. His book about his wretched childhood on the Garryowen estate in Limerick, *The Boy Who Talked to Dogs,* makes grim reading. That he salvaged himself, in the most unlikely way, is both heroic and unfathomable.

The last born of a family of eight, Marty is the third triplet. As he says - "They are a two. Big brave boys. I was the runt, smaller, scareder. My mother had eight problems, and I was the biggest."

Marty grows into an agitated and uncontrollable child. Now it would be called ADHD. In the early 1970s it was called stubborn, disobedient and, most frequently, stupid. He does poorly at school and was beaten and persecuted by his teacher, then thrashed thrashed again by his brutal, alcoholic father when he returns home, despite his mother's efforts to protect him

It is only when he is banished to the coal shed and the company of the family dogs, German Shepherds, Rex and Major, that the boy feels any respite from his compulsive, hyper-energetic behaviour. The dogs soothe his agitation and he begins to feel that he belongs - somewhere. They are kindred to him. "You speak my language," he says. "Or do I speak your's ?"

Slingsby's ambitious production (shared with State Theatre Company South Australia) is the result of a two year collaboration with Irish playwright Amy Conroy, who adapted McKenna's book, songwriter Lisa O'Neill, Dublin actor Bryan Burroughs, plus the usual suspects from previous Slingsby Adelaide-based projects.

Staged in the Thomas Edmonds Opera Studio at Wayville Showgrounds, *The Boy Who Talked to Dogs* is promenade theatre, mixed with Irish ceilidh and puppetry. In one corner is designer Wendy Todd's cutaway replica of that section of an Irish pub where the band stand behind the wooden balustrade, between the bric-a-brac and the ancient framed photos, beneath the muted TV showing replays of Gaelic football.

We are seated in socially-distanced tables of six, and the band – composer Quincy Grant, singer (and musical saw player)Victoria Falconer, and violinist (and musical saw player) Emma Luker - are getting us in the mood. The band sings "Have you heard about the boy who talked to dogs ?" and Falconer summons Burroughs to begin the play.He resists and takes cover at the side of the room.

We are meeting Marty, recalcitrant, frightened, and always stressed. We are also being told this is not going to be a happy tale about a boy having fun with a bunch of doggos.

The impasse concludes as Burroughs begins his virtuosic narration - from his sorry birth up to the age of thirteen when he runs away from his unbearable home and lives rough, stealing and scrounging food for himself and the pack, until he is sixteen. It is splendidly told. Burroughs is a small wiry man and he captures the boy's resilience and his distress.

The beatings from his father, re-enacted on a circular raised stage in the centre of the room, are accompanied by the musicians who turn it into a malevolent, pummeling jig. The scenes with the dogs portrayed by Clara Solly-Slade's almost rudimentary shadow puppets, are the more poignant for their simplicity.

Wendy Todd's intriguing set consists of four sections, one in each corner of the performance space – the Harp and Hound pub, the meagre, but heavily wall-papered, family kitchen and adjoining coal shed in another. The remaining two are the hayloft where Marty retreats with his newfound pack of six stray dogs, and the disused tunnel near the railway depot where he escapes to evade detection.

Chris Petridis' lighting consists of four main lights on portable stands and a variety of strategically placed smaller ones including hand-held torches and table lights. His illuminated images of Marty's pack of six, including his favourite Mossy, are particularly endearing. Andrew Howard's intricate soundscape, punctuated with dog barking, disturbingly permeates the audience.

Andy Packer has set a task for himself managing such a large performance space, and a production layered, not only with Grant's impressively detailed score, but O'Neill's sometimes lyrically cluttered songs. Future versions of this venture might benefit from a more confined space and a paring back of some of the music.

That said, this is very welcome new theatre which will captivate audiences, especially Slingsby's target group of the over-twelves. It would be fascinating to attend one of their many schools performances to share their response.

Burroughs' outstanding performance is undoubtedly the core and the strength of this memorable and affecting work. He navigates the space, moving unerringly through the audience to each new section of Marty's extraordinary story. In his shabby woollen vest and ragged jeans, he convinces us he is a vulnerable child. With his shaven head he is also an ageless penitent. When he faces the enormous shadow image of his inner snarling black dog, he has learned to become his own hero.

He talks to dogs, but he is also speaking to us.

The Boy Who Talked to Dogs is playing at the Thomas Edmonds Opera Studio at Wayville Showgrounds until March 14.

InDaily February 26, 2021.

Agonising trajectory of live-streamed drama

Published: 2021-03-07 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Adelaide Festival

Medea After Euripides Written and directed by Simon Stone Internationaal Theater Amsterdam. Her Majesty's Theatre, Adelaide. Sir Robert Helpmann Theatre, Mount Gambier. March 4. Duration : 1 hr 20 mins.

Eugene Onegin Selected chapters from the novel in verse by Alexander Pushkin. Vakhtangov State Academic Theatre of Russia. Her Majesty's Theatre, Adelaide March 5. Duration 3 hrs 20 mins, including interval.

Since inception the Adelaide Festival has been celebrated for its international program. But like so much else, COVID-19 has scuppered that. Instead, in 2021 - the year of Zoom and gloom - the festival is showcasing *Live From Europe*, a real-time, one performance only, streaming program including pianist, Igor Levit, dance from Sadler's Wells, and two theatre productions – *Medea* and *Eugene Onegin.*

Australian director, Simon Stone's *Medea,* first performed in 2014, is the first of five productions he has created for Internationaal Theater Amsterdam, whose celebrated director, Ivo van Hove has captured festival audiences with *Roman Tragedies* and *Kings of War*.

Cleverly fusing Euripides' *Medea* with details borrowed from the case of Debora Green, an oncologist who poisoned her husband and incinerated two of her children in a house fire, Stone's compelling and deftly imagined version features Anna (Marieke Heebink), a senior research scientist in pharmaceuticals who has not only elevated her husband, Lucas (Aus Greidanus Jr.) in his career, but raised their two children. Now he wants to leave her to marry the daughter of the company's CEO. It is a neat re-setting of the original *Medea* and follows Euripides' agonising trajectory.

Everything about this production is splendid. Bob Cousins' enveloping scenography – bone white walls, searchingly lit by Bernie van Velzen – provides screens for the confronting live video close-ups of the actors, as well as open space for poignant tableaux of grief and vehemence and penitential ash. Stefan Gregory's soundscape, especially the ominous, chiming ambient beats in the final scenes, completes the effect.

The performances are galvanising – Greidanus, as the opportunistic Lucas, Titus Theunissen and Sonny van Utterren, as the doomed boys making home videos of the family ructions, and Heebeck as Anna, with her smiling fury, justifiable outrage, deep sadness and psychopathic vengeance. Stone has brilliantly delivered Medea from Amsterdam to our virtual world and, as Aristotle promised, she brings pity and fear.

The Vakhtangov Theatre production of the verse novel *Eugene Onegin* was conceived, scripted and staged by Rimas Tuminas, who describes the project as an exploration of Pushkin's main theme : the story of Tatyana, a young country girl's love for the dandyish, cosmopole Onegin. He likens his production to the fragments of Tatyana's love letter, which our haughty hero frames and puts on his wall.

But this deconstruction of the original narrative into a three hour series of often spectacular, beautifully lit - but rarely moving - set pieces, disperses the dramatic impact. Tuminas, with a cast of forty, including a dancing chorus of fourteen, overloads the experience with Faustus Latenas's omnipresent musical score, digressive scenes and seemingly extraneous characters such as the irascible narrator and the whimsical snow bunny.

There is also difficulty with the surtitled English text which is awkwardly phrased and jammed into contorted rhyming couplets, creating an unpoetic disconnect with the pleasing cadence of the original Russian and the excellent stylised performances, especially from the leads.

Sergey Makovetsky is impressive as Onegin the elder (Victor Dobronravov is his younger self). Vasily Simonov plays the doomed poet, Count Lensky and the staging of the scene of his death in a duel is a highlight. Oleg Makarov plays an imagined version of Lensky - if he had lived into middle age.

As Tatyana, Olga Lerman is the focal point of much of the production. It is a memorable performance and especially engaging in the later scenes when she is courted by the Prince while they eat treacle off a spoon ! When, finally, she speaks her mind to the belatedly regretful Onegin, the drama has a commanding stillness and intensity that is too often lacking in the hectic theatrics overall.

The live-feed logistics were achieved without a hitch and Adelaide shared this historic experience simultaneously with a Moscow audience. But we were also separated, because much of our Pushkin was lost in translation.

"Agonising trajectory of live-streamed drama", *The Australian*, March 8, 2021, p.12. (In slightly-edited form)

Fringe review: Afghanistan is Not Funny

Published: 2022-02-17 *Adelaide Fringe · Theatre*

Adelaide Fringe Murray Bramwell Fringe review: Afghanistan is Not Funny Five Stars

A high-profile comedian visits a war zone in Kabul and it not only transforms him, but the things he wants to write about. This often comic memoir looks for answers to serious questions.

Henry Naylor is the master of the dramatic miniature. His plays, rarely more than sixty minutes in duration, are a crowded hour of fact, polemic, suspense, and compressed emotion that take us where other playwrights fear to tread.

His *Arabian Nightmares* quartet brought us face to face with people such as Rehana the sniper; Jane the investigative journalist; Kane, the hero in an unpopular war - painfully recognisable in their human detail, but also emblematic of the cruel quagmire that has been Middle Eastern geopolitics for so long.

In his latest work, which has its world premiere in Adelaide, Naylor (crisply directed by Martha Lott) takes to the stage himself to present a candid memoir - reflecting on the first-hand war experiences that steered him towards his now signature brand of high impact theatre.

Afghanistan is Not Funny describes the shift for Naylor – and for world politics - after the 9/11 attacks in 2001. After working successfully in topical comedy, with TV hits such as *Spitting Image* and *Dead Ringers*, as well as a weekly half hour spot on BBC Radio 2, Naylor discovers that the new war footing meant self-censorship. Satirists and comic critics – working in the spirit of Kubrick's *Dr Strangelove* and Robert Altmann's *MASH* - needed to pull their heads in.

A chance suggestion from a journalist, and encouraged by his friend, war photographer Sam Maynard, led Naylor in 2002 to travel to Taliban ruled post-war Kabul to see the situation for himself. His account is energised, mordantly funny, and filled with a sense of the lethal chaos of a country left in ruins. There are run-ins with rogue army officers, scar-faced warlords and the traumatised civilians. The country is a literal minefield, the daily experience is of imminent random danger.

But there is also a bravado in the venture. Maynard is pushing to get to ever more dangerous zones for graphic, but brilliant, photo evidence - of wrecked villages and tank graveyards, or posing the cheering Mujhadeen with their weapons and munitions. When asked why he is in Kabul, Naylor tells the warlord that they are gathering photo stills to illustrate a show at the Edinburgh Fringe !

The show, entitled *Finding Bin Laden*, becomes a festival hit; there is serious talk of a film adaptation and Naylor recalls his excitement at the prospect. But as he has said, Afghanistan is Not Funny - and it is also not fuel for adventurism. Naylor takes his narrative into more rigorous reflection and despite the wit and personable comedy in this performance, its heft is towards conscience and engagement.

The proof of that intention is in the future we already know- *Echoes* and *Angel*, *Borders* and *The Nights*. The Henry Naylor plays we have celebrated on the very stage he is now standing on.

Afghanistan is Not Funny is playing at The Studio, Holden Street Theatres until March 13.

Published online at *InDaily* February 17, 2022.

Fringe review: Meet Me at Dawn

Published: 2022-02-17 *Adelaide Fringe · Theatre*

Fringe Festival Murray Bramwell

Two women are cast on to a desolate beach. As they begin to get their bearings the world will never be the same. Nor, perhaps, will yours either.

Five Stars.

The play opens with a thunderous ocean swell, courtesy of sound designer Sascha Budimski, and a darkened stage, courtesy of Mark Oakley's lighting. Gradually the visibility lifts and we see a young woman drenched to the skin, hair bedraggled, trying to gather herself after being hurled on to the beach by a storm-tossed tide. She is distressed and is calling to another in increasing desperation. Another young woman appears and they begin trying to understand their predicament.

As they take stock of themselves Robyn, the first woman, is nauseous and vomiting. The other, Helen is exhilarated, wired and immediately looking to take action. They have been out on the sea in a hired boat and had got into difficulties. They have scrambled to shore but can't tell if they are on an island, or a sandbar soon to be submerged again by the ocean.

Helen, the scientist, is trying to verify the line of shore. She arranges their wet clothes into an SOS for a possible plane rescue. She is worried about getting back to the house because the dog they are minding has been left locked inside.

Robyn is unsettled – "Something has changed" she says. She is having flashbacks of a kitchen tap overflowing. Helen castigates her for her muddle. Has she got concussion ? Or is it that she lives in a gothic novel and is always miserable? It is as if they are on different planes of being. One of them says : "there are always parallel universes, that can split at any minute."

Director Nescha Jelk has unerringly taken UK playwright Zinnie Harris's luminous short play, *Meet Me at Dawn* and, with the inventive sound and light and Meg Wilson's costumes and simple design creates an intimate space for the two excellent and evocative performances. Wendy Bos as Robyn has a suppressed apprehension and then unfolding terror, while Sarah Bos's Helen has a giddy sense of freedom which turns into exasperation and betrayal.

The unfolding mysteries in Harris's text are intricate and emotionally confronting. A stranger appears on the beach and the women try unsuccessfully to get her help. She answers blankly. Robyn recognises her as a homeless person who sought shelter in their back shed. Helen wasn't there. As if in a fable the stranger says to Robyn she will grant her one wish.

I don't recall reviewing a play before where revealing even a skerrick of the plot would spoil the unfurling lyricism and mythic sadness of its telling. But here it would, so I haven't.

Meet Me at Dawn is a splendid play about loss and grief - and this is a compelling production. It is already a Fringe highlight. Even Orpheus and Eurydice would be enthralled.

Meet Me at Dawn plays at The Studio, Holden Street Theatres until February 27.

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Fringe review: One Hour Photo

Published: 2022-02-18 *Adelaide Fringe · Theatre*

Four and a Half Stars Murray Bramwell

One Hour Photo is a snapshot of one man's life - captured from thirty hours of interview and a lifetime of turbulent after-images.

Adding to the usual array of theatre spaces at the popular Holden Street Theatre hub is Ruby's at No.32. In past Fringes we have seen micro theatre performances in this charming but compact venue but this time it is decked out as a little cinema. Ten comfortable chairs with side tables plus a 75" LG screen and all you need is a program.

Which is where The Cultch comes in. Located in East Vancouver in Canada this theatre company, with director Richard Jordan, has produced live productions for a decade. With Covid that all came to halt – except that Jordan, and Cultch executive Heather Redfern, got busy turning their repertoire into digital form. They took a package of exclusively licenced shows to the Edinburgh Festival last year and Martha Lott selected four works to play at Holden Street.

One Hour Photo, written and engagingly performed by Tetsuro Shigematsu, is a mix of theatre monologue, a TED talk with a slideshow, and random pop culture nostalgia. Darting in and out of history he starts with 1977. *Star Wars*. The launch of GPS satellites. The Apple 2 computer and the launch of the space probe Voyager 1. He is energised by this progress stuff, moving excitedly between display items and screen images, eyes bright, moustache twirling and ponytail bobbing. He is a most affable narrator.

The Voyager project prepared an archive of speeches and musical excerpts to beam into the universe in search of sentient reply. What if, Shigematsu ponders, they had focused on one person's story to represent what a life on Earth might be ?

\In his slim hands he holds up a clear vinyl disc on which he has recorded excerpts from 30 hours of conversations he has made with a Nikkei man, a Canadian of Japanese descent, telling his life story from the 1930s to beyond the end of the century. His name is Mas Yamamoto.

It is a chronicle of tragedy, persistence, and remarkable accomplishment. Soon after his father's sudden death when Mas was in his teens, Japan bombed Pearl Harbor bringing North America into the war but also resulting in the harsh internment of 20,000 Canadians of Japanese descent.

Their home confiscated and future grim, Mas is providing for his mother and siblings. After the war, their fishing boat seized, they move to a rural orchard to grow apples. We hear Mas's voice wryly describing his stoic efforts. But climb he does – working on an Arctic radar project, studying pharmacy, and then, in 1980 – moving into franchise business with a newly patented One Hour Photo shop.

With warmth and affection Tetsuro Shigematsu spans both the larger history of a cruel time and the poignant star-crossed fortunes of the human heart. It is more than a snapshot, it is an album of memory all in one hour.

One Hour Photo is playing as part of *HST on Screen* at Ruby's at Holden Street Theatres until March 20.

Published online at *InDaily*, February 18, 2022.

Back to the Park: WOMADelaide 2022 Returns to Full Strength

Published: 2022-02-21 *WOMADelaide · Music*

Director Ian Scobie and Associate Director, Annette Tripodi talk to Murray Bramwell about re-claiming and re-setting Adelaide's favourite music event - despite the challenges of COVID-19.

WOMADelaide is turning thirty and what a year to have a milestone birthday. From its inception in 1992, when it formed part of Rob Brookman's Adelaide Festival, this vibrant, richly diverse music event has captured this city and brought visitors and rusted-on fans from all over the country.

Based in the CBD in Botanic Park, WOMADelaide (with its slightly clunky portmanteau name) has become a defining part of the South Australian summer. Over thirty years we have seen it become an annual international event, consistent in quality and ever-expanding in its ambition.

But in 2021, as is so many ways both locally and globally, the COVID-19 pandemic changed everything. Despite what we would now think of as low infection numbers, it was not possible to run large music events in the usual way. Many were cancelled, some never to rise again. Others, like WOMADelaide, were modestly amended to carefully distanced, seated concert events. The four nights in King Rodney Park were extraordinary, of course. Who wasn't knocked out by Tash Sultana, The Teskey Brothers and, still in full throttle after all these years, Midnight Oil bringing a

powerful message of Treaty and First Nations reconciliation.

Now, a year later, the pandemic situation is more complex than ever. We have (finally) high levels of vaccination but Omicron has brought unparalleled levels of infection, hospitalisation and mortality. Our contact tracing is kaput and, until recently, key medical supply shortages have made life needlessly hard for many. At the time of writing, however, Adelaide seems to be past peak infections and for the great majority the impact of Omicron has been temporary and receding. The Fringe has begun and the Festival is little more than a week away. Hopes are high but no one knows for sure how it will play out.

Meanwhile, WOMAD is back to its previous scale with a program spread across seven stages in Botanic Park and a list of performers as extensive and intriguing as ever. It is a bold return and while uncertainties inevitably abound, it has been meticulously planned for many contingencies.

Associate Director, Annette Tripodi first joined the WOMADelaide team at Arts Projects Australia in 1997. Her role evolved from there, beginning with responsibility for the Australian content and then, since 2009, she has been in charge of the overall program.

"The program planning started in May last year, "she recalls. "We picked up conversations with artists we weren't able to bring in 2020 and 2021. That included Courtney Barnett who we have never had at WOMAD and is a tremendous performer. And Joseph Tawadros. He will be playing with the 52 piece ASO on the opening night. It is his fifth appearance at the festival. He has performed with his brother, with the Grigoryan brothers, as a solo and duo – all combinations. This orchestral project I can't wait to see. Joseph has been living in the UK for some time and it wasn't feasible to bring him over. But now we have this great event for Friday night. He's an extraordinary musician, composer, and artist – working with Ben Northey as conductor. "

Tripodi also speaks proudly of a series of commissions and partnerships with Nexus producers, Farhad Shah and Emily Tulloch, which has gathered in acts such as Dhungala Baarka and ZOJ. Through the Melbourne based Music in Exile recording label and management group she has signed South Sudanese, now Australian based, performer Gordon Koang, as well as Chik Chika and the powerful eight piece Ausecuma Beats, a Cuban /West African style outfit reminiscent of famous WOMAD headliners such as Youssou N'Dour and Salif Keita.

Also, from the Music in Exile label, is Kenyan singer Elsy Wamayo, now resident in the Northern suburbs of Adelaide, who has developed through WOMADelaide's talent development academy established last year in conjunction with the Northern Sound System project. Tripodi describes her as "going from zero to hero- she's now a sophisticated, dynamic performer." The academy has also developed such talents as the Ugandan dancehall performer, Sokel and the local Indigenous rappers, Sonz of Serpent.

Another act Tripodi is especially pleased with, is DJ Motez's world premiere live show- his first venture away from his signature DJ work to include classical singers, a string quartet, and the composer himself on keyboards. He features on Saturday night. Also branching in a new direction is Italian singer, Carla Lippis and her Mondo Psycho – which Tripodi describes as "Spaghetti Western Italian meets dark hard-edge rock."

While COVID border restrictions have prevented the usual interchange of artists between Adelaide and WOMAD Aotearoa New Zealand (which has a completely separate program when it resumes this year) there is nonetheless a significant group of Kiwi acts in the 2022 line up. The high energy outfit L.A.B whose blend of reggae, funk and electronica with soaring soul vocals is reminiscent of crowd favourites, Fat Freddy's Drop, will feature on opening night.

San Francisco born -NZ resident, Reb Fountain will draw interest with her vocally impressive folk-punk sound. Her debut album captured serious attention and on Sunday night at WOMAD we will hear her perform her newest album, *Iris*. Unfortunately, COVID quarantine requirements have meant Troy Kingi has had to withdraw from the program.

"He and his twelve piece band would have had to isolate for ten days," Tripodi notes. "With family commitments that was too long. This is the way things are with COVID- infections, close contacts. Just lately I've been working on potential replacements and back-ups. Also, groups doing only one show, agreeing to perform a second."

Interestingly, with Australia opening more to international travellers, there are musicians touring here who are booked for gigs at WOMAD. Guatemalan born, Latin Grammy winner, Gaby Moreno will perform, as will Brazilian funk samba trio, Azimuth in combination with composer/producer Marcos Valle. Cedric Burnside from the R.L.Burnside blues dynasty will appear, and late Friday night, Detroit DJ Kevin Saunderson's live show - *Inner City*.

In the folk realm, the aptly named Bush Gothic, featuring Jenny Thomas, will mix Welsh music and Australian bush ballad guignol. The Crooked Fiddle Band from Sydney not only features an array of esoteric instruments (we are talking here of the Swedish nyckelharpa and the 16th century cittern) but have been described as "chainsaw" folk. Comparing them to Elephant Sessions, Tripodi notes – "They have an amazing range, and can rock out in a very big way."

The First Nations program has been a strong feature of WOMAD festivals for all of their thirty years. Tripodi is especially proud of the current list. Emma Donovan and the Putbacks and their most recent exceptional albums come first mind. Kutcha Edwards will make a welcome return. Newcomer Baarka, is a young Malyangapa, Barkindji woman from Western Australian who has fast become a name in the Indigenous rap scene.

The one and only Ab Original will return to acclaim and the five musicians of the Australian Art Orchestra will perform a new work entitled *Hand to Earth* . The young band, King Stingray will debut and Electric Fields return with a touring party of 26 including a choir and dancers.

Jamie Goldsmith and others who present the Welcome to Country are also designing the Climbing Tree at the Kidzone and Dancing Fire, an installation of flaming pylons in Frome Park where, each day, other Kaurna ceremonies will also be performed.

Other headliners include crowd favourites, the Shaolin Afronauts on opening night, The Cat Empire- festival stalwarts for nearly twenty years, delivering a final performance from their original line-up, Saints legend Ed Kuepper with his new entity Asteroid Ekosystem (including Dirty Three drummer Jim White) and, of course, closing the festival - the mercurial and always re-inventing, Paul Kelly and his band.

Annette Tripodi is pleased with the assembled program and is quick to observe that the festival is "back to full bottle – all the WOMAD activities – Taste the World , the workshops, Planet Talks and park activities. And the special new eighth stage for DanceNorth – presenting *Noise*: six performers and 100 drummers. Every day of the weekend."

For Festival Director, Ian Scobie, 2022 is similarly a collision of circumstances. A milestone 30th year which is also in the most unpredictable part of the COVID pandemic.

"These are weird old times. I'm sick of saying that," he notes drily. "But you've got to roll with it, We are back in the Park.

The biggest irony is that after all the effort we made to avoid international exposure, we are most confined by WA and New Zealand. We could have brought groups from Scotland and wherever as the rules presently stand."

Scobie and his staff have been in constant, detailed consultation with SA Health over planning. And the decision to go ahead – back with the usual WOMAD model, was made in May last year. Scobie and Tripodi went ahead on programming and preparing for the COVID protection regimes that would be required. He recalls:

"Right through last year almost to Christmas, before Omicron, it looked like a lay down misere relatively speaking. All the case numbers were looking good . It was all based on vaccination numbers which were looking good (eventually!) but that all changed when Omicron brought another layer of uncertainty."

Scobie is emphatic about COVID policies for the festival. "We were first to go out and say double vax requirement for entry and then the health advice was 12 years and over. Since the paediatric advice has been available, we are saying that children between 5 and 12 years must have had the first vaccination."

When asked about the anti-vax contingent who are now excluded – his reply: "We have benefited more than we have lost. If you look at national vaccination rates, those who object are a small vocal minority.

"In the end, if you aren't vaxxed – don't come. We told the artists very early on that that was our policy and that clear proof of vaccination was required. We came out early, but it is standard for pubs and clubs in NSW. It's a common ruling and, aside from anything, it is a duty of care for our artists and audiences. It's what we say in our Planet Talks – follow the science ! Reason needs to prevail."

Asked for his thoughts on 30 years of WOMAD he says it is a moment for congratulations to many people. "I must also say I am reflecting that the festival began in a different kind of pandemic- the AIDS pandemic and we had support from AIDS organisations at that point. Over the years there have been other global health crises around the world which also affected our programs."

I asked Scobie what the milestone means in the history of the festival ?

"Thirty years is half the age of the Adelaide Festival. I'm sure its longevity has a lot to do with the seeds planted by the original festival in this city and the receptiveness of an audience for an event like this. It shows –and especially in the pandemic- the extent of the feeling and regard with which it is held by its loyal audience. It is a big part of people's lives – the event itself and participating in it. It is much more than the sum of its parts.

"It means different things to different people. Some might have met their future partner there, or got engaged, or just had a fantastic time. It's in the life zeitgeist of the city and for generations of people. From those who were taken as kids by their parents, who now take their own children. "

"And when we have concerns about not being able to have international contingents, we have been able to fall back on the fact that what is important about the festival is the overall experience as much as the great headliners.

"Also, after thirty years, to have a program that is essentially locally based is a reflection of Australia in 2022, as opposed to 1992. I think about if we had to program back then with no artists crossing borders, it would have been a very different line-up. That's a great thing – the depth of diverse material available in Australia now is so healthy and accomplished. And, in these pandemic times, it is important to be engaging so many Australian artists who've had it tough and are going to for a while yet."

"Four weeks out, the logistical train is working as usual. There are issues with flights- schedules constantly change due to the airlines' own staff issues and so on. It's always a constant jigsaw. The thing this year is that the only constant is uncertainty !

"But ticket sales are quite a way ahead of this time in 2020 – our last full scale event. [This year, for COVID, the total gate number is set at 70% capacity.] Interstate sales are high – almost 30% from Victoria, 27% New South Wales and then 30% South Australia. I think this reflects that NSW and Vic have largely moved on in their minds . They have had their lockdowns and they are now out and doing it."

At a time when no one has any real sense what COVID will bring next, even in two weeks or a month, Scobie and the WOMADelaide team have the continuing dilemma that faces anyone planning large social and cultural events. As he says with a tinge of weariness – "Our notion of the future has greatly altered. "

As we close our conversation he says- "I'll see you in the Park." I ask him if he will be riding his bike. "Of course," is the reply. "I'll take my bike, and my hat – and my mask."

WOMADelaide will take place in Botanic Park from Friday March 11 to Monday March 14.

Published online at The Barefoot Review, February 21, 2022.

Adelaide Festival - Twists in tales of surprise, suspense

Published: 2022-03-04 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Blindness Adapted by Simon Stephens Based on the novel by Jose Saramago Donmar Warehouse. Queen's Theatre, Adelaide. Tickets: $20-$79. Bookings: adelaidefestival.com February 24. Duration : 70 mins. Until March 20. Also: Merrigong Theatre Company, Illawarra Town Hall, Wollongong. May 11- 15.

Girls & Boys By Dennis Kelly State Theatre Company South Australia Odeon Theatre, Norwood. Tickets : $44- $80. Bookings: statetheatrecompany.com.au March 1. Duration: 105 minutes. Until March 12.

A motorist, in traffic as the lights change, comes to a sudden halt. He tells passers-by that everything has turned white. In an instant he has gone blind. In no time, across the city there is an inexplicable epidemic of infectious blindness. In Simon Stephens' adaptation of the 1995 novel by Nobel winner Jose Saramago, the fictitious premise takes on dystopian parallels with Covid-19.

This excellent production, directed by Walter Meierjohan for the Donmar Warehouse was, in August 2020, the first stage performance in the UK to open since the pandemic closures in February. The organising principle of Lizzie Clachan's minimal design is social distancing. The audience sit in pairs of chairs, facing in opposite directions.

Jessica Hung Han Yun's lighting – vibrant neon tubes in rectangular patterns above us shift from red to blue, green to white. At one point the neon lowers down almost touching us. We are separate but connected, each wearing a set of headphones, strangely immobilised by the absence of a visible performer.

The narrative , peerlessly delivered by Juliet Stephenson, and brilliantly captured in 360 degree proximity by sound designers, Ben and Max Ringham, is intimate, sinister, unnerving and immediate. It is a tale of rapidly unravelling terror as the newly blinded – including a doctor, his patients, and his wife, who by some fluke still has full sight – are rounded up, interned and left like pariahs with minimal food and support.

It is the wife who takes over the telling and the acoustic illusion of Stephenson's vocal range (from whisper to scream) circles around us as if there is someone right behind us.

Interestingly, we are spared visual darkness – a deprivation that would have made the escalating violence and aural chaos doubly grim. With Stephens' deftly cadenced text and Juliet Stephenson's flawlessly crisp expression, *Blindness* takes us to the edge of the pit. Perhaps it is a kindness in these Covid times that it doesn't leave us there.

By contrast, another recent British work, Dennis Kelly's 2018 monologue *Girls & Boys*, lulls us into the domestic and working life of its unnamed central character and leads us slowly, step by inevitable step, in an unforeseen direction.

It begins as a recognisable story of a life of chance and lucky breaks. The young woman, from a non-descript family, has a brash charm and a sharp mind. As she describes her early party life as a single, then meeting her future husband in an airport queue in Naples, the dark comedy and sensual mischief suggests a working-class version of Phoebe Waller-Bridge's *Fleabag*. Kelly's text is raucous and carefree. The domestic family life with two young children, Leanne and Danny (unlike their parents they do have names) is depicted with the familiarity of a sitcom. The woman's unexpected career rise, after she talks her way into a job with a documentary film production company, has a welcome plausibility to it.

Following the carefully paced shifts and twists of Kelly's unfurling text, director Mitchell Butel capably guides this production to its profoundly affecting conclusion. Designer Ailsa Paterson's set suggests the comfortable affluence of a two-income family. The domestic toys, ornaments, books and so on, are almost a shrine of security, warmly lit by Nigel Levings. Alan John's musical interludes between scenes are melodic and lyrically disarming.

To disclose the plot-line any further not only short-circuits Kelly's virtuosic dramatic intent, it pre-empts the extraordinary impact of Justine Clarke's galvanising portrayal of a spirited, intelligent woman with agency in the world – until that changes. Clarke is outstanding and utterly credible. The last thirty minutes of this production are an assault on both heart and mind. *Girls & Boys* is emotionally cogent and, in its message, devastatingly lucid.

Murray Bramwell

Published in edited form as "Twists in tales of surprise, suspense", The Australian. March 4, 2022, p.11.

Adelaide Festival - Photographic Memory

Published: 2022-03-08 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

The Photo Box Created and performed by Emma Beech Vitalstatistix and Brink Productions Space Theatre, Adelaide Festival Centre March 3. Until March 7.

When left with nothing after bushfires and (as right now) extreme flooding, the first thing Australian families report is their relief that they saved their pets. And the very next thing is that they rescued their photo albums. Family photos are the Dead Sea Scrolls of our domestic history. They reinforce legend, prompt (and sometimes falsify) memory, and, in recording celebrations and milestones, create a narrative that our chaotic consciousness often cannot summon. They are key to our identity. They spark joy and, sometimes, jolt us back to unwelcome recollection.

Emma Beech's latest solo show is one out of the box. One of nine boxes, in fact, of family snaps which were divvied out by her parents, John and Betty. As Beech drily recalls, they were turning sixty, getting old, and thought it was time to pass them on to their nine children. That was 24 years ago and they are both very much still here.

This production is in part, a fractured, non-chronological saga about a large, sometimes turbulent, family from Barmera in the Riverland, in South Australia. In other ways, it is archetypal and indicative of a particular time, and social and ethnic history, which is a part of last century as much as now. It is full of fun and community. There is a simple plenitude in the lifestyle, but also regret and recrimination – and against the background of a large dark Lake Bonney Barmera and a small regional community with its secrets and lies, tragedies and undeclared misgivings. Not to mention the catastrophic Barmera fish extinction.

Dressed in a burnt orange jacket and matching flared slacks, Beech adjusts six variously shaped suspended screens which will soon feature images from her Kodak trove. She also gestures to Meg Wilson's set with its low curved platform lit in blue (by the excellent Chris Petridis) denoting the lake shore. There is a dead tree, a hose pipe and bucket.

As she describes the family Beech – the nine siblings (8 in 13 years) and herself the ninth and youngest by some margin – up pop the images. Emma at age one, Emma's confirmation, Emma as a lesser fairy in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Her brother Pete appears- he will be revisited often- and there is a snap, in its heyday, of Beech Hardware and Building Supplies.

As in her previous shows- *Homage to Uncertainty* and *Life is Short and Long*- Beech has a droll, deadpan delivery and a dry, often self-deprecating wit, although, at times here, she is also more extroverted. The reminiscences, like the images, are in no apparent order – as if springing to mind, or random selections from a box. Many of the photos have that faded yellow-brown look of processing in the 70s and early 80s, before Fuji colour became the thing. Then, there is winter snow in Denmark, her work in experimental theatre, and mention of a Danish ex-fiance.

Babies feature, including her own triplets, but they are glimpses, non-sequiturs. At the SCABU, the special care baby unit, we are told about the babies - some desperately ill, all tiny and premature. We hear about her life as a resident in the ward, sharing with the other parents, about the mothers and some fathers, their struggles and trauma. Beech is skilful at dispersing fragments, details that stay in our minds, worrying in their brevity and niggling with insufficient explanation.

Much of the evening is like this, as it unfolds into a slideshow of fleeting experiences, half-memories, twinges, regrets and unfinished business. It also discloses private stuff. This is her real family she is talking about. That is her own brother's recreation room with drum kit, bar stools and Irish pub stained glass windows we see captured on video camera. Beech tells us that during rehearsal she was asked by a fellow creative if she had done an Ethics Check. And then, on cue, as if to supply a family imprimatur, she brings onstage her eldest sister, Jane ("the upcoming matriarch") and asks her straight if it is OK to talk about Pete's affair in Adelaide. "Everyone knows about that already" is the mordant reply.

But the real disclosures are Beech's own. She recounts the Danish ex-fiance and the cultural and emotional collision of his visit to Barmera for the Beech Family Christmas. It is funny and unsparingly frank. As are her times walking and dancing on the wild side with high-risk party animal, Zeke. And then life in triplicate. The children are kept at arm length from us, of course, but we are left in no doubt what a challenge they brought.

In *The Photo Box*, director Mish Gregor oversees a fascinating and often amusing family portrait, narrated with warmth and charm but also an intriguing detachment. Chris Petridis's projections are fluid and witty, the video cameos of John and Betty directed by Shalom Almond (and filmed by Helen Carter) are suitably low key and quietly eloquent. Jason Sweeney's ambient music envelops the stage with his usual flair.

There is still room for some compression and editing from the sometimes over-abundant material here, but Emma Beech has made memorable theatre from tiny moments. *The Photo Box* needs to go on tour and have a further life. It gives the notion of family entertainment a whole new meaning.

Creative team

Creator & Performer **Emma Beech** Director **Mish Grigor** Dramaturg **Anne Thompson** Film Maker **Shalom Almond** Production Designer **Meg Wilson** Composer **Jason Sweeney** Lighting & Projection Designer **Chris Petridis** Costume Designer **Renate Henschke** Choreographer **Larissa McGowan** Assistant Director **Tim Overton** Welcome to Country **Michael** **Kumatpi Marrutya O'Brien **Producer **Jennifer Greer Holmes **Production Manager **Emma O'Neill **Stage Manager **Françoise Piron**

FILM

Producer & Director **Shalom Almond** Cinematographer **Helen Carter** Editor **Lauren Wells-Jones** Colourist **Sam Matthews**

Adelaide Festival - Theatre : The Picture of Dorian Gray

Published: 2022-03-15 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

With dazzling stagecraft and an extraordinary solo performance by Eryn Jean Norvill, this screenshot of Dorian is a Wilde ride.

“The first duty of life is to assume a pose,” Oscar Wilde declared, “what the second duty is no one yet has found out.” As his biographer Richard Ellmann noted – “Wilde had been much concerned with images . He had painted self-portrait after self portrait.” He was referring to Oscar’s variety of beards, his curled hair and foppish costumes – all of Wilde’s visual ripostes to the punitive drabness and prudery of Victorian England.

Then, as now, to be outlandish is a statement, an assertion - even a declaration of war to one’s enemies and Oscar Wilde’s novella *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* published in 1890, proposed such a challenge. It was also a critique of the aestheticist ideas that he enthusiastically upheld, and a queer message through the flames that would haunt him later at his trial.

In Wilde’s story – moral fable, satire, and Gothic horror yarn, all in one - Dorian Gray, the beautiful young man, painted by Basil Hallward and lured into a life of hedonistic excess by Lord Henry Wotton – makes a pact to exchange his soul for perpetual youth and beauty. In a reversal of the usual state of things – his portrait will age and perish but he will never. It doesn’t end well, but Wilde, as moralist, wants to have a few words each way. Summing up his novella he said – “All excess, as well as all renunciation, brings its own punishment.”

In Kip Williams’ thrillingly imaginative and visually gorgeous adaptation for Sydney Theatre Company, Wilde’s spellbinding narrative is both conscientiously maintained and given a currency and shrewd commentary which transforms and renews the original.

When Wilde was working on the story he admitted in a letter that he was having trouble. “I am afraid it is rather like my own life - all conversation and no action. I can’t describe action : my people sit in chairs and chatter.”

In this production (one of four monologues in this year’s festival performed by women) the brilliant Eryn Jean Norvill presents, with a marvellous range of video and live feed inclusions, 26 characters - many of whom sit in chairs and chatter with each other in real time.

From her first appearance on the huge vertical screen, Norvill captures us. Surrounded by a black-shrouded army of videographers, dressers and others (I counted 13 at the final curtain) she changes costume, position, screen size, and character for two captivating hours. Williams has created an extraordinary display of stage logistics but it is all, and only, to serve the live performer.

Norvill commands the stage as the narrator, as the photogenic Dorian Gray, the painter Hallward with sideburns and the moustachioed Lord Harry. Her delivery is splendid, Williams’ text wisely highlights the cadences and pleasures of Wilde’s elegantly easy prose. Rarely do characterisations step into stereotype except for comedy – in the puppet show of Sybil Vane’s rendering of Juliet, for instance, and in the astonishing illusion of a dinner party scene where Norvill, as Lord Harry, sits beside a long table with four different video images of herself satirising every variety of upper class twittery.

There is much to admire about this production which, having lost time to the Covid closures, is surely still destined for further international festival performances. Designer Marg Horwell has created a sumptuous floral décor around Dorian, enhanced in the vibrant technicolour of David Bergman’s video, delectably lit by Nick Schlieper, and enveloped by composer and sound artist, Clemence Williams’ evocative, at times quirky, score.

As Dorian Gray descends further into the lower depths, it is not art for art’s sake, but glamour for celebrity’s sake. His puckish blonde locks become a pompadour of impudence, Horwell’s costumes shift from page boy whites to lurid Liberace-stylings, or maybe Hip-Hop imperial, with gaudy sequinned cloaks to match his dagger.

When he admires his lavish excess on his iPhone as if in a mirror, Photoshop helps us visualise the distortions of the portrait hidden behind the curtain in his apartment. It is a witty premise. While Wilde’s character exchanges his soul to preserve himself as a work of art, Williams’ reading is more damningly banal. His Dorian is seeking immortality on Tik Tok and Instagram.

The Picture of Dorian Gray is a depiction for our times while reminding us of the brilliance of its author. Kip Williams and Eryn Jean Norvill have created memorable art by holding up a video mirror to show just how far our vulgar narcissism has trashed it.

The Picture of Dorian Gray is playing at Her Majesty’s until Saturday March 19.

Fringe Review: Jesus, Jane, Mother & Me

Published: 2023-02-16 *Adelaide Fringe · Theatre*

Five Stars

In an empty house a young man is waiting to celebrate Mother's Day but the more he describes her –and their religious devotions and special bonds, the more uncertain his rapture becomes.

Written by Murray Bramwell

After the chintzy palladium orchestra fanfare, it is his cheery manner which captures us first. This young extravagant man, eyes wide, all gestures and beaming smile. Hello, I'm Daniel Valentine.

He is in his mother's house dressed in a summer dressing gown and is waving a bright red duster. We notice from Craig Lomas's set that the door behind him is boarded up, there is a conspicuous cross on the wall, two chairs and baskets full of unsorted clothing.

He is having some kind of spat with his neighbour Joyce. He wanted to give her a red duster also but she rejected him. He leaves it out on the roadway and spies out to see if she has collected it. He talks about music that he loves – *Passion Pop*, *Songs of Praise* and Jane. More of Jane later.

Describing his isolation he talks about his absent mother . She said he put too much store on the opinion of others. He admits he finds life disappointing. There are references to a church figure, the Reverend Birch, and his mother. She is a very dominant woman, he says matter of factly. He writes wryly in her Mother's Day card- "Thank you for making me the man I am today."

UK playwright Philip Stokes's excellent monologue (which he also directs} unfurls from the perspective of a young man who is persecuted at school and isolated from friends because of his difference. He has anxiety attacks, is probably gay and is perpetually bullied.

His mother is taken into the arms of an evangelical church group and Daniel also joins in. When the Rev Birch preaches the forthcoming day of Rapture, when the faithful are summoned, Daniel sees salvation from his pent-up life in small town Yorkshire.

Then, when the church group goes on an excursion to a concert, Daniel's life is transformed. Never having been to a live performance before he is dazzled by its spectacle. More glorious than church, he is captured by the central singer. Jane McDonald is an actual Yorkshire singer made famous by the reality TV show, *The Cruise* featuring her life as an on-board entertainer.

Mother and son are both agog with her stage presence and power ballads. Jane has replaced Jesus. They clear Daniel's bedroom and create the Nerve Centre – with Jane merch and memorabilia. Daniel drily notes that Family Services called it a shrine.

As Daniel, Jack Stokes, the eighteen year old son of the playwright, brilliantly and poignantly sustains the young man's quixotic drive to be himself in an unwelcoming, un-nurturing world. The distinctive Yorkshire accent and descending cadence is reminiscent of those dry deadpan Alan Bennet monologues where nothing is quite what it seems and, as here, things start to come seriously apart at the seams.

Stokes's brave smile becomes more brittle, his dazzle more flickering. His unravelling story, and its telling, makes for a spellbinding hour of theatre.

Jesus, Jane, Mother & Me is playing at The Studio, Holden Street Theatres until March 19. It is Holden Street Theatres' 2022 Edinburgh Fringe Award Winner.

Fringe Review: The King of Taking

Published: 2023-02-20 *Adelaide Fringe · Theatre · Comedy*

Five Stars

Rubber-limbed and deadpan, New Zealand mime wizard Thom Monckton makes an hilarious return as the selfish King whose only subject is himself.

Written by Murray Bramwell

He has played the Adelaide Festival as *The Artist* and, back in 2016, the much-lamented Croquet Club as *The Pianist.* Now, the inimitable Thom Monckton is *The King of Taking*. A preposterous figure in none-too splendid isolation, he is the Mr Bean of hopeless monarchs, and delivers a slapstick routine that draws gasps of smirking pleasure.

Monckton's comedy is painstaking and cleverly extruded to its very limits. Who can forget him taking six long minutes just to get through the stage curtains in *The Pianist* ? And then a multitude of further tribulations to reach the keyboard.

In *The King of Taking* there is an open empty stage with a long curtain at stage left. At centre is a high narrow throne with Gothic trimmings and red velvet. The publicity promises plenty of velvet and the rolls of carpet stacked around the throne do not disappoint. Two red wall lights and a candelabra complete the décor.

There is a large lump covered in drapery on the floor in front of the throne and it starts to wriggle and move across the stage and behind the curtain. This is yet another protracted arrival. Trumpet fanfares repeat and re-set over and over as the mystery figure flails behind the curtain. Eventually he glides in from stage left like a low-slung motorboat. It is surreal, comical and the perfect visual gag.

Rising to his full lanky height he is dressed in a skinny, baggy, white

onesie, and drags an elaborate particoloured velvet robe trailing jester's ribbons. Around his neck he wears a clown's ruffle, on his head a yellow paper crown. The king, complete with ginger beard and an un-majestic agitation, has arrived.

Getting on to his high throne is another matter and at one point he disappears head first, with only his feet showing - like in a classic Tex Avery cartoon. The timing and the mute consternation, mixed with smug self-importance, is delicious to watch. It's hard to know which is funnier – the predictability or the surprise.

The king imperiously calls for his courtiers. There are three ropes available possibly to summon them. One is a bell, another a blackout light switch, the third could be anything. He doesn't speak except to summon. Jonathan, he calls in fifty shades of forlorn urgency as he tries to have a red carpet rolled out, or a trumpet fanfare, or a single splash of cymbal. Edward, Abigail and Philip are also called, with varying success, to serve this once and feckless king.

For fifty minutes the complications multiply and the sight gags, sudden death pratfalls, and the slings and arrows of sudden misfortune bring continuous fun. Thom Monckton has a rare and inventive gift for witty clowning. This royal show is definitely for the taking.

The King of Taking is playing at The Studio, Holden Street Theatres until March 5.

Note: Patrons are invited to bring this greedy King a small wrapped gift to share in the improvised fun.

The World Returns to Botanic Park

Published: 2023-02-24 *WOMADelaide - Music*

Murray Bramwell talks with Director Ian Scobie and Associate Director Annette Tripodi about the rapidly approaching WOMADelaide 2023

Annette Tripodi is not really pondering the idea that WOMADelaide is entering its fourth decade. She is just pleased the current one has landed in the net. "It's worth saying that the last three years have been so peculiar in that we never knew what the next festival would hold..."

COVID-19 has cast a long shadow over all of the performing arts and WOMAD has been no different. Back in 2020 the very beginnings of the pandemic were evident in March. Some Adelaide Festival artists arrived testing positive. Others hurriedly left the Fringe for home in the Northern Hemisphere, cancelling shows in the final weekend. WOMAD completed its full program just before borders closed and quarantine became mandatory.

For 2021 Ian Scobie and his crew came up with an inspired solution organising their four nights of outdoor concerts at King Rodney Park. With the socially distanced seating and masking requirements it set about being as safe as possible in an unsafe time. The shows were brilliant – Midnight Oil at their majestic best with their Makarrata Project, flanked by Sarah Blasko, the late Archie Roach, The Teskey Brothers , Tash Sultana and others. The sound was impeccable, and it was a rare experience to hear live music in a year when so much was cancelled and abandoned.

2022 saw a return to something closer to the festival of old. It was a substantially local line-up with many brilliant musicians – Ab Original , Cat Empire , Emma Donovan, Bush Gothic and Joseph Tawadros and the Melbourne Ska Orchestra to name a few . Paul Kelly presented a glorious set on the final night and other highlights, for me, included Springtime and Asteroid Ekosystem. It was a musical success and it turned out not to be a spreader event. And now for 2023.

"It's kind of exciting and also terrifying" Tripodi observes "to be returning to our international line-up and also with our partner WOMAD New Zealand back on board. They've been absent since 2020. So we've almost forgotten how to do something on this scale and the way this has turned out, it's a particularly high profile amazing one.

"I also think it was easier for it to come together than before the 2020 event because there were conversations we were having with artists for some years. There was a rolling list. Some we were asking before 2022- if we were able to bring internationals are you available and interested? But there was so much uncertainty about borders opening that we couldn't make decisions three months in advance- it was terrible for planning.

"We had artists like the Garifuna Collective from Belize, with whom we'd been speaking for years, delayed by the rolling pandemic. For San Salvador (from Southern France) the delay was both pandemic and personal - two couples had just had children and weren't travelling at all. ADG7 the South Korean pop/folk sensations were also on the list. That's just to name three. All classic WOMAD artists who'd never been to Australia. They are sensational live and each is unique. It's such a buzz . They are not actually here yet – but it's looking exciting.

"I'm sure all the artists in the 2023 line-up will have a million stories about things that went wrong, things that were made challenging for them in the last couple of years."

The pandemic has certainly had its impact on logistics. Tripodi notes:

"Just in an operational sense it is harder to get the travel routes and flights you want. A small example is that Emirates, they were an airline we used a lot – you could fly a group from Paris to Dubai to Adelaide. It was simple, affordable and great for the artists . There are now no direct flights."

I also asked Ian Scobie about concerns getting artists and their luggage (their valuable, often rare instruments) safely, and all at the same time, to Adelaide. While sparing a thought for the pressures on airlines in the new order, he described some precautionary strategies they have used:

"Even before passengers there is freight. We did get all (the feathered angels aerial theatrics company, Gratte Ciel's) *Place des Anges* equipment into warehouses a couple of months ago to avoid any disasters of stuff not arriving. And we have arranged an extra rest day for artists, even for local interstate artists, because domestic schedules have been less reliable."

"There's always a concern for any artist," Tripodi observes, "that their beloved instruments don't arrive. So we look at 'what ifs ?' - if a band's specific specialist instruments don't turn up, not guitars so much, but can we lay hands on a harmonium quickly ? So there are a lot of logistical challenges behind the scenes. But it's fair to say that it takes longer, and costs more, to get somebody here than it used to."

Another new complexity has been created by greater customs and immigration controls. Artists from some countries and airports now have to meet stringent biometric requirements. Passport holders from France – and Tripodi estimates there are fifty to sixty of them - now have to do fingerprinting in Paris before travelling, which is a new hurdle. There are also implications for artists from Cuba and Pakistan.

When we talk about the program Annette Tripodi lights up.

"We are absolutely rapt at the range of acts, the spread of countries and the ages and diverse appeal of the festival. Having Bon Iver on Friday night and Florence + the Machine on Saturday night is just out of this world. I never imagined we could pull off that off in the same festival. We have spoken to Bon Iver for years and weren't able to make it happen. It got deferred and deferred and then they contacted us and it was all on. And with Florence also it finally happened. They are outstanding live artists that suit our vibe but they will also bring in a whole new audience.

"There are great headliners among many others. It's wonderful to have (WOMADelaide 1992 original) Youssou N'Dour on Monday night and (the powerhouse Colombian band) Ondatropica on Sunday. "

So what are some of the gems in the program ? Tripodi starts with guitarist Justin Adams and violinist and vocalist Mauro Durante who will perform from their recent recording *Still Moving*. Adams has a remarkable CV which includes Tinariwen and Robert Plant. Durante has collaborated with CGS and Ludovico Einaudi.

The Korean band ADG7 Tripodi describes as" kooky high energy musicians who are not only danceable but bring folkloric shamanistic traditions and instruments." Kocoroco, led by trumpeter Sheila Maurice-Grey, also gets a mention. "It is great to see this evolution of Black jazz coming out of London, influenced by Afrobeat and other styles."

Visiting WOMAD UK last year, Tripodi and Scobie caught up again with Rizwan Muazzam Qawwals. They are the nephews of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan who first presented qawwali, this spellbinding Sufi devotional music, late at night at the very first WOMADelaide. It established a tradition at WOMAD. Many of us thought of it as "The Nusrat Hour ." Often located at Stage Two or the Zoo Stage, it featured Indian and Pakistani virtuosi performing extended ragas and vocalisations, and became a feature of the many festivals which followed..

"We went to their first show in the UK "Tripodi recalls, "and they were amazing. But then their second show at 11pm on the final night was just transcendental." They will perform in late night programming in Adelaide also.

The First Nations section of the program is also strong again this year. The The NSS (Northern Sound System) Academy which nurtures and develops new talent, she describes as "going from strength to strength." This year inclusions are Aotearoa performer, Taiaha Ngawiki, aka Taiaha 'The Weapon' (who is now living in Aldinga) bringing a mix of hip-hop and Soul and R'n'B artists as Otis Redding, Ray Charles and Nina Simone.

The other NSS selection is Dem Mob featuring, Elisha Unmuhuri and Jontae Lawrie, from the APY Lands, who are the first young rappers to perform and record in the Pitjantjatjara language. Tripodi says they have evolved into a great band – "great rappers who are on the cusp of something even more." They perform on Saturday, Taiaha has one show only on Monday.

Other First Nations musicians who feature this year include Ripple Effect, an all-women group from Maningrida in Arnhem Land. The frontline vocalists harmonise in five Indigenous languages as well as English. Also appearing on Saturday is Richard J Franklin, a Gundjitjmara elder from south-west Victoria. A multi-talented artist and activist, Franklin is a musician, filmmaker, novelist, academic, playwright and songwriter who will bring much to the WOMAD program.

The Ailan Songs Project led by Jessie Lloyd, will perform, interpreting songs from the Torres Strait Islands, and Kee'ahn, whose single *Better Things,* struck an uplifting chord during the pandemic lockdown. She is a multiple award winner including the 2020 Archie Roach Award.

The leading First Nations dance company, Bangarra will perform on Friday night. Tripodi is especially excited: "It's wild to think how far that company has gone since they last appeared at WOMAD. We've waited a long time to get the timing right for them and now it has happened again."

"And on a personal level I'm really glad that Soul Ii Soul are featuring in the festival. They and Inner City were my two favourite bands when I was living in Sydney in the '80s! They were another pandemic delayed act and will bring a full band and support musicians – it will be great to have them on the main stage."

Since the very first festival there has been a strong representation of women artists and this year is no exception. It is said that women hold up half the sky, and they will prominently hold up the day and night skies at WOMADelaide in 2023. It is a list as diverse as it is impressive. Sampa the Great from Zambia (and Australia) will perform one show – but that's one more than in 2021, when she was scheduled for the concert series in King Rodney Park but was marooned in Zambia by pandemic border restrictions.

US country music singer-songwriter, Angel Olsen will feature her latest album *Big Time*, Madeleine Peyroux, with only one show on Monday, will draw on her wide repertoire, including her own works and those by Serge Gainsbourg, Leonard Cohen, even Charlie Chaplin. Queen of the banjo Abigail Washburn returns to Adelaide with her partner Bela Fleck, a banjo player of legendary standing. Their performances will be both charming and virtuosic.

Aurora will bring her Norwegian electro-pop and Yungchen Lhamo from Tibet returns. Since she last performed her Buddhist chants at the 1992 WOMADelaide, she has collaborated with Paul McCartney, Philip Glass and Sinead O'Connor. From Aotearoa NZ, acclaimed singer Ria Hall will perform on both Sunday and Monday with a set showcasing her vocal range, singing in English and Te Reo Maori.

And for the dance crowd, the DJ list is impressive and women rule – Jaguar, Sister Nancy meets Legal Shot and Jyoty will all appear. Not forgetting Nightmares on Wax, GUTS ,and the drum virtuoso, Alexander Flood who, as a young child, first performed in a music parade at WOMADelaide.

Annette Tripodi has her favourites. "Florence is a powerhouse. Real World Records also told us about Bab L' Bluz, they are a Moroccan Psychedelic rock outfit. Ian and I met them in the UK and they shared some South Australian wine with us ! They are really young and fresh. Another great band is Kefaya with their powerful lead singer, Elaha Soroor . And where else do you see a woman from Afghanistan, leading what is essentially a rock band ? She's a pocket rocket. "

Constantinople, a Canadian project which featured at a previous festival with a program of West African themes, this year returns with *In the Footsteps of the Rumi*, focusing on the works of the 13th century mystic poet. The ensemble features yet another woman vocalist - Belgian /Tunisian singer Ghalia Benali. Tripodi's list of favourites continues – Taraf de Calui, the newest incarnation of the Romany legends, Taraf de Haidouks, Ukrainian group Balaklava Blues (who will also be providing music for the Festival theatre work -*Dogs of Europe*) and, from Argentine, dedicated to the legendary master of tango, comes Quinteto Astor Piazzolla.

Reminding me of the mix that is WOMAD, Tripodi predicts a big following for The Proclaimers, supplying their singalong favourites and new material from their album drolly entitled, *Dentures Out.* And for those needing more Greetings from the New Brunette there's Billy Bragg. The Lachy Doley Group's Hammond organ rock set and Saharan guitar wizard Mdou Moctar and his band will be a likely crowd favourites also.

Armed with such a strong program this year, Ian Scobie is quietly confident. "It is bigger than we have ever done," he notes with some amazement, "There are more than 700 artists – about a hundred more than previously. It's big. We are coming back to the fore with an international program. We wanted to come back with a bang and provide a lift in the festival experience – especially to interstate people returning after a break.

We didn't want people to be disappointed.

"I also wanted to re-connect with the 30th anniversary feeling. It wasn't until 1993 that WOMADelaide became a standalone from the Festival. So we were keen to have a Wow factor and getting acts like Florence and Bon Iver contributed to that. It will bring in younger fans and those who have not been previously, as opposed to rusted-on fans who never miss. That's always our intent with our programming. And you see it in the sales. The advanced sales are off the charts." (At the time of writing all 3 and 4 day tickets have sold out, as have Saturday single passes)

Scobie also has his favourites. *Place des Anges,* Rizwan Muazzam Qawwals, Richard J Franklanl, Meute, and Indian musicians, Pandit Ronu Majumdar and Dr Jayanthi Kumaresh, who were recommended as part of the long-standing Spirit of India programming project which is now supervised by WOMAD legend, the violinist, Subramaniam. Kronos Quartet, long time Adelaide Festival favourites, celebrate fifty years of performing with two performances at WOMAD. And, having Youssou N'Dour back, after being there at the very beginning, Scobie smiles, is also great."

Pausing, Scobie turns to another part of the festival program.

"The debate over the Voice is equal parts enraging and encouraging and WOMAD has a place in that discussion. We will have a session in The Planet Talks and we will be supporting the Yes campaign, like we have with previous social issues – right back to health campaigns and AIDS messaging in the early '90's. It is important to have the right level of advocacy – not harping, but as part of a socially conscious cultural event."

"The festival is like a child, it has a life of its own, Scobie observes in conclusion. "It grows up and it's off on its path. So many people have a view of the festival - and it is what is for them. They always go to this stage first or that food stall. It's kind of a people's tradition and it does remind me, as a small child growing up in Mildura, going to the Mildura Show- a country show. This wonderland that was set upon the Mildura Oval.

"I had this sense of the social fabric and I think WOMADelaide has that resonance. A sense of continuity in the world, a sense of connectedness. So much else is going in all directions- the constant handsets and screens, people cut off in their separate realities. So the collective sense of WOMAD is special. "

WOMADelaide runs from March 10 -13 at Botanic Park/Tainmuntilla, Adelaide.

Published online at on February 24, 2023.

Theatre: Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde

Published: 2023-03-04 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Adelaide Festival Theatre: Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde

Robert Louis Stevenson's classic tale about the struggle between public virtue and unconscious impulse is brilliantly transformed for stage and screen.

Written by Murray Bramwell

One of the many happy consequences of ongoing Adelaide Festival programming is that we have the chance to see the development of new work from artists and companies who have performed previously.

So, after last year's extraordinary work, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, we now have adapter and director, Kip Williams' Sydney Theatre Company's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Very different in tone and visual style, it is a much-awaited work and in its way, it is also extraordinary.

The rudiments of the story of Jekyll and Hyde are widely known, you could say it is a modern fable. It has its predecessors - dualities, doppelgangers and ruptures of consciousness and identity preoccupied 19th century society. But it was Dr Jekyll and his split personality that anticipated Sigmund Freud's notion of psychosis and the later concept of schizophrenia, and the story is widely known as an example of these conditions.

The Jekyll/Hyde myth has been, as Williams observes, "deployed as a shorthand for a person with two opposing sides to their identity." Instead, this production explores the multiplicity at the core of human experience. As he puts it – "to rebuke the binaries." And there is much justification for this rebuke since even the diagnostic language has changed from terms like split personality to dissociative identity disorder.

The opening scene of this production is as astonishing as *Dorian Gray* was previously. The impact of the actors performing in real time while a squad of darkly-clad videographers dart and weave to capture them for relay to large movable screens is immediate. Titles indicate it is Chapter One and we are introduced by Ewen Leslie, as narrator, to Matthew Backer as Gabriel Utterson, the conscientious lawyer and friend of Henry Jekyll. The images, in pristine monochrome, are huge and compelling as the story begins to unfold.

Preparing for a street scene, designer Marg Horwell's apt and nimble décor designates a row of dim Victorian street lamps to form a walkway for Utterson and his friend Enfield, now played by Leslie in specs and a frock coat, to set the intrigue in motion. The energy and rhythm of the performances and their screen capture is delectable to watch as the actors deliver Stevenson's dense but cadenced prose with clarity and precision.

Everything said and performed is relayed, amplified and reframed. Utterson reaches into his safe for Jekyll's deed of will and the camera is waiting to capture it. David Bergman's black and white images are reminiscent of earlier screen versions of the story - Frederic March in 1932 and Spencer Tracy in 1941- but they seem clumsy in contrast to the lithe narrative created here.

Ewen Leslie, like Eryn Jean Norvill in *Dorian Gray,* plays a multitude of roles. Taking on a moustache for Dr Lanyon, or a Yorkshire dialect for the butler Poole, he deftly distinguishes the characters. For Mr Guest, the clerk, the wig is especially variant, but the greatest challenge is Hyde. Stooped and lumpen is obvious, the long greasy ringlets and black contact lenses are intriguingly heavy metal.

Nick Schlieper's lighting is in itself illuminating. The sequence when Utterson is climbing a staircase in search of Jekyll is masterly (especially with Clemence Williams' artful musical score inspired by Herrmann and Hitchcock) and the moment (from Lanyon's horrified account) when Hyde transmogrifies back to the not-so-good doctor is a highpoint.

"If he be Mr Hyde, then I shall be Mr Seek." Matthew Backer as Utterson anchors the production with his modest, industrious zeal to solve the mystery. It is expertly pitched and a perfect foil to the necessary histrionics as Leslie, sometimes on a knife-edge, has to navigate a cast of many. And, as Kip Williams' parallel case of someone with hidden and proscribed impulses and desires, Utterson's experiment with Jekyll's potion ushers in a scene of unexpected colour, movement and mirror balls.

Despite an unexpected medical emergency in the audience which caused a twenty minute halt to the performance, the production did not break its stride. It is an ambitious, innovative take on a challenging text. Stevenson's story is, to an extent, an unconscious and unresolved work (he called it his "fine bogey tale") whereas Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is a suave and knowing satire which especially lent itself to the excellent renovation it received by Williams.

Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde is also perhaps a tad too long to fit easily into the two hour performance time and the final chapter has a haste to it that gives more urgency than reflection. Nonetheless – two actors, 13 technicians and a splendid team of creatives have produced a terrific work which is a highlight of this festival – and hopefully at many others.

Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde is playing at Her Majesty's until March 12 as part of the Adelaide Festival.

Theatre: Hans & Gret

Published: 2023-03-06 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Adelaide Festival

Theatre: Hans & Gret

An old fairy story is revisited with a new kind of witch, a futuristic dystopia obsessed with staying young, and Gret, not Hans, as the prime investigator.

Windmill Theatre has specialised in taking a story we think we know and, while keeping it recognisable, also turning it into something refreshingly rich and strange. They did it with *The Wizard of Oz*, *Pinocchio* and *Rumpelstiltskin* and they are back with an angsty take on The Grimm Brothers' tale *Hansel and Gretel.*

On entering the Queen's Theatre we find, waiting on our seat (courtesy of tech innovators, Sandpit) a smart phone and a set of in-ear headphones. On the phone we fill out a short survey. Of our ages (do I really have to scroll this far back to find my birth year ?) then some attitudes on life, and our family relationships. We are also asked whether we are Now or Then ? And our views on rice crackers. Having supplied this data we then, according to our demographic, receive specific narrative cues through our headsets while we watch the play unfold.

The setting is the near future and the Hans and Gret family live indoors. Designer Jonathan Oxlade has devised their part of the strictly gated community as a glass brightly-lit barn, piped with neon in his signature style. Outside are The Woods. Not "Into the woods, it's time to go" woods, but the empty space where the famine gets ever worse and Oxlade's artfully garbed Wolf Boys roam and raid.

The family has its usual bourgeois quirks and anxieties. Mum is on another rejuvenation diet and skin treatment, Dad is a good natured peace keeper, Hans is a shy techie who has designed a GPS app called Breadcrumbs and Gret, who is having a first-time love affair with her friend Sim, wants to wear a onesie to the school formal. It is only when Sim goes missing after the friends quarrel outside the city security cordon that things start to go wrong.

The production has some charming set pieces. Windmill can never resist a school dance and the formal, exuberantly lit by Richard Vabre, and energised by Brendan Woithe's outstanding sound design is a highlight. The narrative headphone cues summon a bunch of under 18s from their seats to dance a wild rumpus as stage extras. Talented dancer, Jo Stone is no longer the tetchy Mum as she expertly cuts the rug with Dad (James Smith) and others join in.

But this momentary harmony is short-lived. Gret's search for Sim takes her very far out of her comfort zone. She is alone and really into the woods. Hans is too busy trying to locate his grandpa on Breadcrumbs to play his traditional lead role, fending witches with an old skinny bone.

It is Gret's encounter with the Witch which shifts both tempo and tone. This Witch is no stooped hag in a shawl, but the amusingly mercurial actor Gareth Davies, dressed in cream flannels and yoga beads. He is a blonde wellness/life coach/ guru/huckster enticing, not just Gret, but the whole audience, to follow our own true path, spinning a line of self-fulfilment as satiric and insincere as it is plausible.

Writer Lally Katz (whose quirky script is based on an idea from former director Rosemary Myers) credits Davies with shaping the play at this point and it provides a palpable lift to the momentum. I can only guess what the narrator is whispering to the post-millennials to have them so noisily join in the reality TV call and response.

The lead performances are excellent. Dylan Miller as Hans is endearingly constant to his restive sister and nicely captures his brotherly wariness. Emily Lui is also memorable as Sim, Antoine Jelk plays Wally and Chrissie Page is Old Gret. But it is Temeka Lawlor's steady and convincing performance as Gret which anchors the work.

Because there is a lot for director Clare Watson to keep together. A Grimm fairy tale has turned into very grim sci-fi. The Witch's prime goal of infinite rejuvenation is deeply sinister in its implication. The notion that the adult generation is vampiring the youthful lifeforce is like something out of J.G. Ballard.

This is a challenging Windmill adaptation that carries dark generational questions that seem almost too much for the play to bear. I am very curious to know what the target schools audience is making of Gret's unexpected destiny. But my headphones are silent.

Dystopian reality and the wars within

Published: 2023-03-06 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Murray Bramwell

Adelaide Festival Theatre

Dogs of Europe Based on the novel by Alhierd Bacharevic Translated by Daniella Kaliada Belarus Free Theatre. Dunstan Theatre, Adelaide Festival Centre March 2. Bookings: adelaidefestival.com.au Tickets: $40-$109. Duration: 3 hours including interval. Until March 6.

A Little Life Based on the novel by Hanya Yanagihara. Adaptation by Koen Tachelet Internationaal Theater Amsterdam. Adelaide Entertainment Centre Theatre March 4. Bookings: adelaidefestival.com.au Tickets: $60-$129. Duration: 4 hours including interval. Until March 8.

In the opening weekend of the Adelaide Festival, the theatre listings are particularly enticing. The visually impressive *Dogs of Europe*, from the permanently exiled activist company Belarus Free Theatre, is based on the presciently dystopic six-part omni-novel by Alhierd Bacharevic, which includes a predicted history from 2019 to 2049 of the New Reich, a totalitarian Russian superstate engulfing all of Eastern Europe and Asia -erasing nationality, ethnicity and culture.

No wonder the work of this company has been proscribed in Belarus. This production opened in London on the same day as the invasion of Ukraine.

Directors, Nicolai Khalezin and Natali Kaliada have focused on several sections of Bacharevic's sprawling compendium with the story of young Mauchin (played by Havel Haradnitski) growing up in a New Reich village, witnessing the apparatus of oppressive invasion. He also encounters a mysterious parachutist and keeps this as his secret.

This theme of resistance and curiosity is pursued in the second act when the excellent Haradnitski morphs into Teresias Skima, an investigator travelling Europe visiting the last remaining bookshops in a quest that is both mystical and mysterious. Books are crucial to the play, even as we see them destroyed and rendered unfathomable. Diderot is quoted- "when you stop reading, you stop thinking."

The ensemble of ten actors - plus energising, haunting onstage music from Mark and Maricha Marczyk (whose band, Balaklava Blues, is also playing at WOMADelaide) - is vibrant, explosive, startling and at times comic, as they navigate the series of micro-plays, dance routines, flashbacks, and oddly Beckettian dialogues that constitute this sometimes baffling, impressionistic narrative.

Richard Williamson's visual design and lighting is captivating (augmented by Roman Liuby's whimsical and eerie animation). The performers are enveloped by a feast of sound and images – surreal, hypnotic, dreamy and disturbingly graphic. In echoes of Robert Wilson perhaps, photographic realism is interspersed with huge cut-outs of wild geese, capering pandas, and the ubiquitous burning of books.

It is always a matter for celebration, at the Adelaide Festival, when Ivo van Hove and his company Internationaal Theater Amsterdam return with a new work. Based on the 2015 novel by Hanya Yanagihara, *A Little Life* is a departure from Van Hove's large repertoire of classic texts. Set in New York's Soho, its 800 pages describe the lives of four young men who meet in college and charts their destinies over 30 years.

JB is a visual artist on the make, Willem an actor, Malcolm an architect and Jude is a lawyer with an undisclosed history, tormented by childhood sexual abuse and trauma. Rich in American detail, the novel explores friendship, love, addiction, and the limited consolations of material success.

In this stage version, artfully adapted by Koen Tachelet, van Hove has limited the American references. This is not the Netflix ten part version. Rather it has been distilled to essentials of story and characterization, transforming it into a contemporary stage tragedy.

Performed in Dutch with English surtitles, it uses a large stage with the audience facing from two sides. The décor is spare and functional, large screens run a continuing loop of NYC street scenes but focus is on the actors at all time. And they are extraordinary in their clarity and assurance.

At the centre is Ramsey Nasr, unforgettable as Jude St Francis, the ruined boy, now irreparably damaged man, self-mutilating and drowning in shame. Around him are Maarten Heijmans as Willem trying to rescue him with love, Daniel Hoen (last minute substitute) as JB and Edward Jonker as Mal, with enduring friendship. Steven van Watermeulen is Harold the father figure, while Andy the doctor (Bart Siegers) battles to mend him.

But Jude is invaded by hyena memories of insurmountable cruelties. In flashbacks, Hans Kesting is terrifying as a trio of demonic torturers, while Marieke Heebink, as Ana the counsellor, fights to win back his spirit and will to live. In its stillness and intimacy, its silent pain, and tragic inevitability, Ivo van Hove's latest production is theatre at its very best.

"Dystopian reality and the wars within" *The Australian*, March 6, 2023. p.12.

Tragic Lifelines

Published: 2023-03-06 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

A Little Life Based on the novel by Hanya Yanagihara. Adaptation by Koen Tachelet Internationaal Theater Amsterdam. Adelaide Entertainment Centre Theatre March 4. Duration: 4 hours including interval. Until March 8.



Ramsey Nasr, Steven Van Watermeulen and Hans Kesting. Photo: Adam Forte It is always a matter for celebration, at the Adelaide Festival, when Ivo van Hove and his company Internationaal Theater Amsterdam return with a new work. Based on the 2015 novel by Hanya Yanagihara, *A Little Life* is a departure from Van Hove's large repertoire of classic texts. Set in New York's Soho, its 800 pages describe the lives of four young men who meet in college and charts their destinies over 30 years.

JB is a visual artist on the make, Willem an actor on the rise, Malcolm an architect soon to thrive and Jude is a respected lawyer with an undisclosed history, tormented by childhood sexual abuse and trauma. Rich in American detail, the novel explores friendship, love, addiction, and the limited consolations of material success.

In this stage version, artfully adapted by Koen Tachelet, van Hove has limited the American references. This is not the Netflix ten part version. Rather it has been distilled to essentials of story and characterization, transforming it into a contemporary stage tragedy.

Performed in Dutch with English surtitles, it uses a large stage with the audience facing from two sides. The décor is spare and functional. There are tables indicating an artist studio here and an architect's drawing board there, there are simple couches and low-slung chairs where the actors sit, as still as cats, waiting for their next cue. At each end of the stage, large screens run a continuing loop of mundane NYC street scenes but it is mere wallpaper. The focus is on the actors at all time. And they are extraordinary in their clarity and assurance.

At the centre is Ramsey Nasr, unforgettable as Jude St Francis, the ruined boy, now irreparably damaged man, self-mutilating and drowning in shame. His presence is constant as are the manifestations of his plight. In the middle of the large empty stage is a wash basin on a pedestal. On the underside of this banal object are taped his cutting blades, rolled neatly as if for a surgeon, waiting for the next irresistible impulse to cause pain to release pain.

Jude is a wreck. His legs don't work properly, he forgets to eat, and he is constantly adjusting the bloodied bandages around his wrists. He wears office suits and ties, but as the play progresses, more bloodstains soak though his white shirt and the more desperate are his attempts to keep his sleeves rolled down. Through all this, Nasr maintains a kind of dignity and stoicism, it is also frozen shame. He is in constant purgatory. It is not heroic, never melodramatic. Just an immovable fact of his life. He is the ordinary version of Jude the saint of lost causes. He is the most hopeless case.

Around him are his devoted friends. They have their issues and problems and they lead busy lives in their work worlds too. But they are drawn back to Jude. He puts on his brave face that promises that things will improve and they serenade him all over again.

Maarten Heijmans as Willem is trying to rescue him with love. He is a fount of kindness and his patient attendance is something akin to a medieval suitor. He desires Jude but remains chaste. Eventually it is apparent that Jude's sexual capacity, both physical and emotional, had been obliterated even before it began. Willem, it is revealed, had a brother confined to a wheelchair whom he revered for his fortitude and good nature. Some of this he transfers to Jude whom he believes he can cure and mend with love, that it will conquer all.

Others such as JB (played by assistant director Daniel Hoen in a last minute substitution for the indisposed Majd Mardo) struggle to please Jude. But JB the hustling painter who immortalizes him in a series of paintings that attract the attention of buyers from MOMA, offends him by not seeking his permission to sell. In a moment of frustration he ridicules him as St Jude the cripple and capers in cruel parody. For this he is sent to Coventry, relegated by Arthur (or maybe Galahad) from the Round Table.

Nasr captures this rigorous principle, this unyielding rigour in Jude even as he is abject and degraded. Edward Jonker as Mal, pays tribute to Jude with his architectural plans. Rebuffed for the temerity of suggesting that his loft might need some disability aids in the design, he returns to his drawing board to humour and console him. Each of these relationships is established with emotional thrift and vivid dramatic impact.

Steven van Watermeulen as Harold the father figure, who formerly adopts Jude at the age of thirty, is unlike the hearty American version in the novel. Rather he is a prim, dignified man, who spends his non-performing stage time cooking a meal which wafts into our nostrils. The cast eat it in open view of the mingling audience when the interval begins after the first two hour mark.

It is Harold, his benefactor and patron, who nonetheless is forever unrolling yards of absorbent paper and kneeling down to wipe up the most recent pools of blood, as if he is Job also being tested with endless tasks and lessons in futility. And for the medical toil, it is Bart Siegers, as Andy, the doctor who first treated Jude's self-mutilation in Emergency, and is now the go-to in the succession of crises that follow, each escalating in seriousness. It is he who wearily repeats the medical warnings, and he who endlessly battles to mend him.

These shifts by his friends, this roster of vigilance is staged with ritualistic calm. There is no recrimination or open resentment. Ivo van Hove brings a Dutch Calvinist quiet to these scenes . It is sordid Vermeer not Tennessee Williams or Larry Kramer. But it has echoes of the AIDS vigils, so perhaps Tony Kushner's Angels are hovering here too.

Interspersed with these ministrations we see Jude invaded by what he calls his hyena memories. Memories of unerasable cruelties, unerasable because they are inscribed on his body, in his ravaged insides, his damaged limbs and nerve ends.

In flashbacks, we are made to witness Jude's history of mortification and violent abuse. In scenes of terrifying lucidity the extraordinary Hans Kesting (whose utterly free-from-cliché, Richard III was the revelation in *Kings of War* back in the 2018 Adelaide Festival) plays, in turn, all three of Jude's demonic torturers.

First, Brother Luke from the monastery to which Jude was sent after being abandoned in garbage as an infant and then raised in heartless and incompetent children's homes. Luke seduces him with kind promises and perverted declarations of love. He conjures a monstrous marriage in a rustic setting – a tryst in a cabin beside a lake with boy not yet eight. When it is revealed that he is pimping him to a paedophile ring our revulsion is even greater.

Then Kesting appears as Caleb, the psychopathically sadistic fashion company CEO who rapes Jude repeatedly and brutally derides and punishes his disability like a Medieval Vice figure. These scenes are harrowing but not sensationalized. Their horror is as much conjured in our imaginations as realized on the stage before us.

Similarly, with the most evil of all, Dr Traylor, who imprisons Jude over a number of months. First he cures him of his venereal disease. Then each day for ten days he brings medication. It is like a series of repetitions in a depraved folk tale- before systematically scourging him as a whore; a boy of sixteen who has been abused against his will since the age of five. It culminates in the blood sport night hunt when Traylor, pursues Jude in his car, taunting him to out-run him, while he shines a huge beam of light on him, revealing his wretched nakedness. It here that his athlete's legs and spine are permanently mutilated beyond repair.

Kesting brings careful differentiation between each of these characters without a shred of cliché or guignol. There is a clinical politeness to Luke and Traynor's implacable cruelty, while the entitled rage in Caleb is that of a high-functioning, high status psychopath. Each of his characterisations is flawless in its evil nuance and they make our flesh crawl. It is the most courageous acting to see. Peter Brook, in explaining his version of the Theatre of Cruelty, called it pitiless acting.

The other supplier of flashbacks is the excellent Marieke Heebink, whom we saw in the titular role in the streamed video version of *Medea* directed by Simon Stone from the 2021 Festival. As Ana, the counsellor, she intervenes and tries to help Jude, already extensively traumatized and damaged at fifteen.

She is the first to help him reverse his shame and guilt, to insist he is not to blame. She offers strategies to reframe his self-loathing. Like a guardian angel she is fighting not just to win back his spirit and will to live, but to retrieve his very soul. This is Psychomachia, the recurrent subject of Medieval Morality plays, the struggle between Virtues and the Devil for the safety of the human soul. Ana's swift death from cancer is an inconsolable loss to Jude, even as her shade reappears frequently throughout his life.

There is so much in this production which warrants praise and admiration. I called it a contemporary tragedy and so it is. The tragedy is that Jude, an innocent child, is broken on the wheel by the age of five. It is a tragedy (and a crime) because he is already beyond repair. He cannot be fixed, not with hope or faith or love. He is already dead. Never in a stage work have I seen a more sustained and confrontingly believable depiction of how a life ruined by systematic sexual and mental abuse cannot be redeemed or restored.

This is what has happened to thousands of victims of child sexual abuse from authority figures – priests, teachers, doctors, supervisors in institutions and orphanages. Men and women who were trusted to protect and who broke that trust. Or worse, used it as a cloak to offend repeatedly and without mercy. This is what the life-long consequence of childhood abuse looks like.

We know this from journalism and TV film documentary. But with a production such as this we can really know it. In our minds, our hearts and imaginations, from a cast of actors, in four gruelling but illuminating hours in the theatre.

Ivo van Hove and his exceptional company of actors, choreographers, lighting and sound experts Jan Versweyveld and Eric Steichim, and musicians (including the live performing string quartet BLINDMAN) have produced a work of intelligence and profound empathy.

This is what Aristotle meant by pity and fear. This is how art can instruct us and we can understand the nature of the inexplicable and unforgivable. This is what Euripides, Aeschylus and Sophocles gave us; the chance to imagine and rehearse the best and worst and then see the actors, restored to life and health, stand and take a bow. In this way the stage is a safe space. Not to protect us from the truth but to countenance it. It is how we learn about hard and difficult aspects, the forbidden and despised. It is what the stage has always been there for.

In its stillness and intimacy, its silent pain, and tragic inevitability, Ivo van Hove's latest production*, A Little Life* is actually a great deal of life. And it is theatre at its very best.

Murray Bramwell

This is an extended version of the shorter notice for *The Australian* published below. Revised March 6, 2023.

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Uplifting

Published: 2023-03-10 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Grey Rock Written and directed by Amir Nizar Zuabi Remote Theatre Project. Space Theatre, Adelaide Festival Centre. March 10. Until March 12.

We last saw the work of the remarkable writer and director Amir Nizar Zuabi at the Adelaide Festival in 2018. Touring then with his Palestinian ShiberHur Theatre Company, he presented two plays *Azza* and *Taha* both of which made an enduring impression for those fortunate enough to see them.

So Zuabi's return with *Grey Rock*, under the auspices of the Remote Theater Project is an event much anticipated and it does not disappoint. Zuabi's seemingly simple productions carry timely and important meaning for audiences in the UK, Europe and the US. Through his projects and affiliations with the Young Vic, United Theatres Europe and the Sundance Institute Theater Program he presents the human face of the Palestinian people and their predicament.

Like the Belarus Free Theatre and their production *Dogs of Europe* also playing in the festival this year, he is giving a voice and visibility to a population under siege; for men and women and children caught up in a grim geopolitical nightmare that has become abstracted, reductive and too bitter to unravel - as the heated fulminations around this year's Writer's Week demonstrated yet again.



Khalifa Natour as Yusuf. Photo: Roy VanDerVegt Grey Rock is as compelling as it is original. Yusuf, a grieving widower in his sixties, is a Palestinian TV repairman who has a secret mission. In fact, it is a space mission – to send a rocket to the moon. He has been working away in his shed, poring over blueprints and calculations, gathering materials and components, all sourced from the internet. No one has any idea, not even his loving daughter Lila, who thinks all his email writing might be him contacting a secret lady friend.

Fadel, a bright young high school graduate who has mysteriously turned down a scholarship to study in Houston, Texas, has been making the online deliveries to Yusuf and has enough physics and engineering know-how to guess something is going on.

Suspicions widen. Jawad, Lila's commercially-minded fiancé is concerned Yusuf's activities will damage his father's business interests. Others suspect Yusuf, once imprisoned for publishing a dissenting political pamphlet, is now collaborating with the Israelis. Everyone is fearful of a reprisal of some kind from the authorities.

In no time the news is out that it is a rocket. Yusuf's argument and reasoning is inspiring. Literally inspiring, as he points to the first Moon Landing in 1969 and how it galvanised, not only the American people, but for a moment made the entire world look up to the heavens, above their usual irreconcilable differences.



Yusuf and unknown Space figure. Photo: Roy VanDerVegt I wondered about the title for this remarkable play. Google tells me that "grey rock-ing" is a strategy:

> To "grey rock" a person involves **making all interactions with them as uninteresting and unrewarding as possible**. In general, this means giving short, straightforward answers to questions and hiding emotional reactions to the things a person says or does. It is a way of becoming a minimal target. Necessary but also diminishing. After a while, the business of defending becomes all there is. This is Yusuf before we meet him, then Yusuf's plan is a reversal of that. He becomes pre-emptive and startling, with absurdity and quixotic human imagination.

In his director's notes Amir Nizar Zuabi writes – "This act, in a place like Palestine, is an impossible feat and carries the weight of a political act . It is defying the nature of oppression – to break free from the historical past …and ignore the political present. It is a celebration of the human spirit, it is a celebration of freedom."

It is a zany plan full of impossibilities. Yusuf recites the catchcries of the Apollo program – JFK-isms like: we are doing it, not because it's easy, but because it is hard. It is the Mouse that Roared. It is a Rocket to the Moon.

And it is uplifting theatre. Tal Yarden's set design is simple and striking. The opening dialogue takes place in front of the curtain. When it is raised we glimpse into Yusuf's workshop (gloriously lit by Muaz Jubeh) with clotheslines pegged with transparencies and blueprints and a few gizmos pertaining to construction. The rocket, very aptly, is left entirely to our imagination.

The performances are delightfully engaging. Propelled by Zuabi's funny, sharp, heartfelt dialogue, the characters are vividly and memorably drawn. As Lila, Fidaa Zaidan captures the exasperation of a daughter who, with her late mother suffered for her father's sense of principle, and now wants to find a safe, dull uncomplicated husband in her fiancé, Jawad (played with broad but believable gusto by Alaa Shehada).



Yusuf and Sheik (Motaz Malhees). Photo: Roy VanDerVegt Luca Kamieh Chapman brings a likeable charm to Fadel, the young unworldly scholar who is captured by Yusuf's dream and even more by his daughter, and as Sheik, the iman from the mosque, Motaz Malhees brings a humanity and generosity to a cleric who might well have been Yusuf's fiercest adversary.

Much of the success of this fine production rests with the excellent Khalifa Natour as Yusuf. It is such a relaxed, comic, wise rendering of an ordinary man with an extraordinary plan. He speaks with wryly humorous simplicity and dignity about rebuilding the capacity to imagine and strive. He reminds us of the past glory of Arab science and echoes can-do American optimism as correctives to the oppressed mindset of occupation. His surprise strategy is not a weapon, it is an audacious, gone-viral-on-CNN, rocket of hope.

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Herd Mentality

Published: 2023-03-16 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Adelaide Festival The Sheep Song by Jonas Vermeulen, Stef Aerts, Joe Agemans, Thomas Verstraeten, Marie Vinck, Matteo Simoni with Bart Hollanders, Titus De Voogdt, Yorrith De Bakker. FC Bergman Toneelhuis, Antwerp. Dunstan Playhouse, Adelaide Festival Centre March 16. Until March 19.



Titus De Voogdt In the final weekend of the Adelaide Festival's theatre program comes the most intriguing- the FC Bergman company's *The Sheep Song*. Described in their program notes as "a visual story without words, an epic solely for the eye. It is explicitly in keeping with the tradition of the animal fable, but also a variation on it."

This sometimes mystifying, often compelling, always fascinating 75 minutes of theatre begins with the tolling of a huge bell suspended from the proscenium. Our attention is drawn to a scratching, restless sound of hooves and gradually, through dim lighting, we see a flock of sheep. Ten actual living, breathing sheep. Their movement is aimless and silent – not a bleat to be heard. It is eerie, and more so, when a single figure is visible, writhing and struggling as if in some distress. Gradually we watch as this one sheep manages to stand, tottering on its hind legs.

Speaking of fables, a modern one comes to mind – George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. Is this sheep declaring "Two legs good, four legs bad"? Certainly they (the non-specific pronoun is apt here) are standing out by standing up, moving away from the flock as it meanders back into the backstage wings.



From there the epic journey of Ovis Orientalis Avis begins. A wild sheep in flight indeed. Except that our woolly quester is marching with a spring in their hooves. Moving on the perpetual conveyor belts on the stage floor Ovis O is surrounded by other people – commuters, workers – all intent on destinations, paying no heed to each other but glancing with momentary hostility at the outsider making conspicuous efforts to fit in with their new adopted herd.

Lit by Ken Hioco like a surreal Flemish painting in russet and dark tones and enveloped by Senjan Janssen's sound design and Frederik Leroux-Roels's ambient music, augmented by pensive banjo played live onstage, the production has a sense of curiosity and wonder counterpointed by apprehension, anxiety and sudden violence.

The Sheep encounters random other travellers in the world as they move relentlessly, and seemingly without purpose, back and forth across the stage. Much of the view is in profile. A blind woman with a cane has (another real) barking dog on a lead. The Sheep pauses to watch a ranting speaker, presented as a miniature puppet booth with red curtains. We have no idea what is being said but this bitter orator (who is constantly resorting to ribald priapic exhibitionism) is definitely not offering a message of peace and hope.

Our hero is intercepted a number of times by a kind of herald figure, naked from the waist down and whose head is completely swathed in a red scarf. With his puckish gyrations and portentous implications this device is one of the few jarring elements in an otherwise splendidly judged production.

In another cameo the Sheep encounters a matador carrying a bull's head, which in turn the bullfighter wears himself and lays back in the Sheep's embrace as he dies from his wounds. It is unaccountably poignant tableau, like a pieta between sheep and bull. And a grim reminder that meat is murder.



Most disturbing is the episode with the crying infant -part sheep, part human- which the Sheep tries to soothe without success. It is a deeply disturbing shift in the narrative. As is the gradual shedding of the sheep characteristics. Having hands to play the banjo and now wearing a jacket is a poor exchange for what we come to realise is the Sheep's intrinsic nobility.

Throughout the performance our eyes are fastened on the Sheep. This is due in no small part to the superb costume designed by Joelle Meerbergen and the extraordinary performance by Titus De Voogdt. He finds gestures, feelings and melancholy puzzlement to memorably capture the experience of the Other in a hostile, self-preoccupied, emotionally insecure world. This Sheep's song is a sad one and the world he has taken up will never be his. Neither, as he returns without his golden fleece and gentle nobility, will the paddock from where he first set forth.

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2024 Adelaide Festival program launched

Published: 2023-10-20 *Adelaide Festival*

The program for the 2024 Adelaide Festival has been unveiled and it is a first for incoming Artistic Director Ruth McKenzie and general manager Kath Mainland. It promises excellence, continuity and a showcase for emerging works that may prove to be future classics.

Written by Murray Bramwell

“We were both here for the 2023 festival, “says Ruth McKenzie, “but that was the last one for Rachel Healy and Neil Armfield – which went incredibly well, as all of their festivals have. It is a particular moment for a new team when you are looking at your first festival, 2024 and then ’25 and ’26.

“At the same time as we are starting there is a new director at Avignon (which Adelaide has always considered its sister festival) as well as at the Edinburgh International Festival. There is an interesting synergy between us as we are all wondering - ‘What is a festival in the 21st Century ?’

“In his Avignon event in July this year Tiago Rodrigues has been ruminating on how artists can help us understand urgent issues and reconcile issues from the past, while the slogan for Nicola Benedetti at Edinburgh was – ‘Where do we go from here ?’ ”

Bringing experience from events in Europe and the UK, including the Holland, Manchester International, and Chichester Festivals as well as the 2012 London Olympics, McKenzie is seeking a lively mix of distinguished artists familiar to Adelaide Festival audiences as well as young, new vibrant practitioners both Australian and international.

As part of her future strategy she has added Netherlands-based Wouter Van Ransbeek from the Holland Festival as Associate Director to scope emerging work and established repertoire for 2025 and 2026.

The operas have already been locked in for the next three years with the first already announced. Canadian, Robert Lepage returns with his production of Stravinsky’s short opera, *The Nightingale and other Fables.* Having provided numerous highlights to Adelaide festival programs – from *The Dragons’ Trilogy* in 1988 to more recent works such as *Needles and Opium* and *The Far Side of the Moon,* Lepage will be a welcome return.

As will Barrie Kosky, artistic director here in 1998, and bringer of his 2017 masterpiece *Saul*, with his recent production, for the legendary Berliner Ensemble, of Brecht and Weill’s most celebrated creation, *The Threepenny Opera.*

Other favourites returning in 2024 include the esteemed Laurie Anderson, who will be presenting *I’ll Be Your Mirror* invoking her late husband musician and poet, Lou Reed. It is built around AI-created works developed while working as AI Artist in Residence at the Sia Furler Centre at Adelaide Uni. Anderson calls it “a 21st century ouija board. “

Celebrated choreographer Akram Khan will stage a re-reading of Kipling’s *The Jungle Book* (including reference to climate change and a change of gender for Mowgli). And Berlin’s Schaubuhne theatre director, Thomas Ostermeier will bring a stage adaptation of Edouard Louis’ memoir, *Qui a tue mon pere* (Who killed my father) performed solo by the author.

Other Internationals visiting the festival for the first time include conceptual artist, Marina Abramovic and the Marina Abramovic Institute (MAI) convening *Takeover*, a participatory endurance project in the Space Theatre. Another favourite of McKenzie’s is Elizabeth Streb with her Extreme Action choreography combining dancers with contraptions called Action Machines. Streb says it’s not dance and definitely not acrobatics or circus. McKenzie notes Streb doesn’t even like the word choreograohy. This intriguing hybrid work is entitled *Time Machine*.

In her announcement McKenzie is eager to highlight a new generation of festival artists. Under-30s such as playwright-actor Kamilaroi man Thomas Weatherall whose one-person play *Blue* was a stand-out in this year’s Sydney Festival. It will be performed by Callan Purcell, currently playing Aaron Burr in *Hamiliton.*

Melbourne collective Pony Cam, in league with theatre artist David Williams will present *Grand Theft Theatre*, a collection of their favourite fond and formative theatre moments, some of them gathered from travelling-on-a-budget visits to previous Adelaide Festivals in their younger days. And, from Greece, comes director Mario Banushi with his play without words, *Goodbye Lindita,* which has been hailed as the work of the next Romeo Castellucci.

Other theatre includes *I Hide in Bathrooms,* a new work by Adelaide artist Astrid Pill with collaborators Ingrid Voorendt, Zoe Barry and Jason Sweeney, presented by Vitalstatistix at Waterside, Milo Rau’s *Antigone in the Amazon* (Brazil/Belgium) an amalgam of film and live acting, and a work in progress from Andy Packer and Slingsby, spread over three festivals, entitled *The Tree of Light*.

Ruth McKenzie also makes a pitch for *The Promise,* featuring Dutch singer Wende. Developed with a group of writers at the Royal Court in London she describes it as a “a song cycle about women’s silence.”

There are two First Nations premieres featured in 2024. Opening the festival and performed on Glenelg Beach (Pathawilyangga) Kaurna Country, *Baleen Moondjan*, is a major new commission from Stephen Page, former director of Bangarra Dance Theatre, and the 2004 Adelaide Festival. Drawn from a story told by his grandmother from the Ngugi/Nunukul/ Moondjan people of Minjerribah (Stradbroke Island) it celebrates the totemic connection with the baleen whales and their significance. The design is by Jacob Nash with music composed by Steve Francis.

Guurunda, created by Jacob Boehme and presented at Her Majesty’s, is a collection of Narungga Creation stories from SA’s Yorke Peninsula. Performed by a group of First Nations artists from that community, it is a mix of story, song, puppetry and dance featuring song-woman Sonya Rankine and songman Warren Milera. Artwork is by Kylie O’Loughlin.

Restless Dance also has a premiere for 2024. Created by director Michelle Ryan, with music written and performed by Carla Lippis, *Private Dance* (to quote the program) “invites audiences into a world of secret desires and dreams, exploring taboo subjects of love and sex.” ADT (Australian Dance Theatre) has a new work by Daniel Riley, *Marrow*, also at the Odeon, and Dance North’s *Wayfinder* will be in the Space Theatre in the final weekend.

The extensive music program ranges from the *Chamber Landscapes* weekend program at UKARIA, curated by ACO director and violinist Richard Tognetti pondering the concept of Nothing, to the Elder Hall Daylight Express lunchtime concerts. Music Viva will host *Long Lost Loves (and Grey Suede Gloves*) featuring mezzo-soprano Anna Dowsley. The Goldner String Quartet will play three nights in the Town Hall, The Adelaide Chamber Singers will perform Carl Crossin’s composition *There Will Come Soft Rain* and, likely to be in keen demand, the excellent Vikingur Olafsson will play the most awaited *Goldberg Variations* since Glenn Gould.

The 2024 Biennial is entitled *Inner Sanctum* as curator Jose da Silva contemplates “the imagination as a place of refuge and sanctuary”, while Artists with Disability present us with works under the wry banner of *Yucky* at the ACE Gallery. Writers’ Week features, among many, Elizabeth Strout, Mary Beard , Trent Dalton, Anna Funder, David Marr and Anjum Hasan. WOMADelaide has a mega line-up, including Ziggy Marley (at last) Sharon Shannon, Baaba Maal and many more yet to be announced.

Ruth McKenzie puts up the final image in her showcase presentation. It is a list. 17 days, 64 events, 16 world premieres, 12 Australian premieres, 23 Adelaide exclusives. But she is still asking the questions - what are festivals for ? And how do you work with artists and citizens to understand how to build a festival for the future ?

In the meantime, the program is out. The 2024 AF is on its way.

InDaily October 25, 2023 (In slightly varied form)

Adelaide Fringe: Grav

Published: 2024-02-15 *Adelaide Fringe*

Written by Murray Bramwell

You don't have to know about rugby to enjoy *Grav*. But if you do, this one-hander, performed memorably by Gareth J Bale, really kicks it out of the park.

Ray Gravell played more than 400 games for his Welsh club Llanelli, earned 23 caps for Wales and played for the British Lions in 1980.

He described himself as "just a minor cog, quite an ordinary player to be honest." Fellow players, opponents and his loyal army of Welsh fans would noisily disagree. He made the ordinary, extraordinary - and embodied a tenacity, self-reflection and steadfast loyalty which raised the hopes and pride of a nation.

Owen Thomas's clever and insightfully fashioned text, unerringly directed by Torch Theatre's Peter Doran, explores a life which began in the mining village of Kidwelly and extended to film-making and the media. He featured in films with Jeremy Irons (directed by Louis Malle) and - himself a rugby fan- Peter O'Toole. He was also revered and liked as a rugby commentator.

In the cramped confines of Holden Street's Ruby's (capacity 28) Bale's Grav looms large but is also minutely observed. Much of the focus is on his father, from whom the brawny young man always wanted proud approval. Interestingly, Grav often lacked confidence and Bale captures his yeoman determination to please and re-assure his coaches and fellow player.

He describes his life in discontinuous narratives. Childhood memories are time-shifted to descriptions of games. He relives his anxieties as key matches approach. Encounters such as the fixture between West Wales and the All Blacks in 1972. This famous, unexpected win is told like a battle from *The Iliad*. It is mock heroic but also, in Bale's rich Welsh-inflected telling, genuinely heroic as well. We share his pride in his country, the Wales doing it hard during the Thatcher mining closures, rising up against centuries of condescension. Then the attention segues to the transformative grief when his father goes missing.

There are fleeting references to later health crises in Grav's life. These jumps and asides leave us with dots to connect. Owen Thomas's script operates with such splendid emotional thrift that the impact is all the more compelling.

Grav is amusing, captivating and steers wide of the platitudes and complacencies of official sports biography. Gareth J Bale gives us a vivid portrait of a player who could stop stampeding All Blacks in their tracks, but also had exceptional gravitas as a person.

FIVE STARS

Grav is playing at Ruby's, Holden Street Theatres, from February 13 to March 17.

Adelaide Fringe Theatre: England & Son

Published: 2024-02-15 *Adelaide Fringe*

Written by Murray Bramwell

When a play begins with a man screaming in a dumpster we know this is a story of the lower depths. *England & Son* is a corrosive account of the degradation and insecurity of working people in the UK, escalated by the Thatcher years and even more pervasive today.

We don't know the man's first name but his surname is England and so was his father's. At one point in his childhood, England the younger is drummed into helping his father do demolition work, tearing down buildings in London for scrap. His father deplores the ruin of the familiar but if it's a living then join in, he says, and call themselves England & Son.

Written by Ed Edwards, author of the 2018 play *The Political History of Smack and Crack*, *England & Son* is a collaboration with performer Mark Thomas and draws on first hand experiences of violence, drugs and incarceration. It is bleak, darkly funny, grimly prophetic and an almost clinical account of inter-generational male brutality and abuse.

Thomas is galvanising as England, the boy and young man, who grows up yearning for a father's kindness, for someone to share a laugh and ruffle his hair. But such happiness is so scant and uncertain it is worse than none at all. The father, a soldier in the Malayan Emergency that lasted until 1960, comes back to his home country, scarred by his own role in state-sanctioned atrocity, and incapable of adjusting to everyday life let alone his family.

The boy is a ward of the state from an early age. Boys' homes, special military style boot camps run by sadistic squaddies, hurled from pillar to post. In league with his only friend, Paul, he becomes a master thief, expert in the value of antiques and collectables, looting nearby country houses. Respite comes from a former social worker who knew him at age seven. She fosters him briefly but inevitably it goes awry.

Stringently directed by Cressida Brown, with boundless energy and unwavering focus, Mark Thomas is terrifying and heartbreaking in his depiction of a young man's ruin. We see the intelligence and wit of this boy England, his promise and broken spirit.

It is a fierce, sometimes sardonic, but relentless account of the structural cruelty and exclusion that drives the young to crime, the solace of drugs, and the doom of becoming their fathers. *England & Son* is urgent theatre, as lucid as it is dreadful to countenance. But stare at it we must.

FIVE STARS

England & Son is playing at The Studio, Holden Street Theatres from February 13 to March 17.

Adelaide Fringe Theatre: The Portable Dorothy Parker

Published: 2024-02-15 *Adelaide Fringe*

Written by Murray Bramwell

With her acid wit and memorably wicked aphorisms, Dorothy Parker is a rich subject for the stage, and playwright Annie Lux has seized the chance. *The Portable Dorothy Parker* draws its title from the writer's first collection, garnered from works published in *Vanity Fair*, *The New Yorker* and literary magazines.

It is 1943, and an emissary from Viking Press is visiting Parker to hasten the selection process. The setting is her apartment - a chair and table with a lamp, a typewriter, and a stack of articles, poems, literary miscellany waiting for decisions. And then, across the stage, a well-stocked drinks trolley, ready to provide copious libations.

Parker picks up a page, maybe reads a few lines and then begins to reminisce, quibble, reflect, and mull her life in writing and the writing of her life. It is a terrific device and Annie Lux has plenty to choose from.

Such as Parker's marriages, her friendships with the humourist Robert Benchley and Alexander Woolcott, the demon critic, escapades at *The New Yorker,* and liaisons with literary lions such as Hemingway and F.Scott Fitzgerald. As well, there is the celebrated and infamous round table lunch held every day for ten years at the Algonquin Hotel.

Regrettably, in performance, this complex, sad, gaudy, often drunken, woman, and her fearless, quixotic engagement with the male dominated world of letters, is somehow lost in translation. In the role of Dorothy, Margot Avery, undoubtedly understands her mercurial, capricious personality, but does not succeed in conveying it.

It is commendable that Avery, and director Lee Costello, have not opted for a loud, abrasive rendering such as Jennifer Jason Leigh's in Alan Rudolph's best forgotten, atrocious film. But in the Arch Theatre at Holden Street, Dorothy Parker is often not loud enough to even be heard.

Lux's text carries a lot of freight, laden with quips and supercilious phrasing. Parker is holding court, performing desperately to impress the unseen young person from Viking. Necessarily this requires a more heightened style for impact, in order to provide contrast to the more pensive asides, neurotic doubts and second thoughts which provide a parallel, even contrary, commentary.

In her muted, often inaudible, delivery Margot Avery replaces Parker's self- serving oratory with a mixture of diffidence and indifference . Parker is weary and diminished, but Avery, and director Costello, have vitiated her energy and flair to the point of torpor. Maybe a stage microphone intensifying the volume will restore some vitality to the production. At the moment, to use Parker's own waspish comment, this performance runs the whole gamut of the emotions from A to B.

THREE STARS

The Portable Dorothy Parker is playing at The Arch, Holden Street Theatres, from February 13 to March 17.

Another Stroll in the Park

Published: 2024-02-23 *WOMADelaide · Music*

As WOMADelaide 2024 draws closer, Murray Bramwell talks to Director, Ian Scobie, about bringing in the new and keeping the familiar .

“Things are going pretty well. Touch wood” As always Ian Scobie is taking early soundings in late January. He has been involved with WOMADelaide for all of its 32 years. Right back to 1992 when APA was formed and Festival director, Rob Brookman negotiated with WOMAD UK’s Thomas Brooman to bring World Music artists to a weekend festival in Botanic Park as part of the 1992 Adelaide Festival.

From what now seems a modest (but brilliant) beginning, WOMADelaide, with its wonky portmanteau name, has become an annual music juggernaut. The last four years have been a testing time. As for all events, public and private, COVID has loomed large, caused havoc to our lives and made planning ahead almost impossible.

My conversations with Scobie and Assistant Director Annette Tripodi over that time have focused as much on whether the festival would go ahead at all, let alone what the program might be.

“I look back at 2023”, Scobie reflects. “We were staring oblivion in the face in terms of COVID. People saying big events are dead. People will be worried about crowds (more worried about queues as it turned out !) The commentary, particularly in the Eastern states was that everything was going to be different. All kinds of predictions.”

“WOMAD 2023 was the first major event in the country to have a full-scale international program since COVID. We were fortunate in our timing in 2020, we got through by a whisker before, two weeks later, the whole world shut down – or borders anyway. In 2021 we had a different something. It was a series of concerts in King Rodney Park which provided a popular Australian program - and a safe space.”

“By 2023 I thought we needed to throw the kitchen sink at the program. It had to be unmissable. We brought back Gratte Ciel with *Place des Anges*

[the aerial spectacle of inflatables and feathers]. People loved that. It was recognisable. We also needed to reach out beyond our usual loyal audience, because some people might not come because of the pandemic. As it happened, everybody came. There were more people than we bargained for.”

So going into 2024 Scobie and his team were dealing with small, but emphatic, choruses of disapproval about the 2023 experience. Complaints about toilet queues and the drop-in entourages of popular performers. Florence & The Machine attracted huge crowds on the Saturday night and for many the experience was overwhelming. WOMAD is a highly ritualised event. It has a familiar topography and although the music is continually changing the vibe has stayed the same. That is why it is a festival with 30 year-plus longevity. It is dynastic. Those who came first as children return as adults and parents. It has always had a contingent of the over-60s- and well over that, as well.

“There were people who wanted the small boutique event they’d come to love,” Scobie observes. “And then their spot wasn’t available because there were too many people – that kind of sense of privilege, I suppose, that some audiences can develop. It is both a plus and a negative. “

“The ethos of WOMADelaide is that of the Adelaide Festival itself. You ensure the best possible circumstances for the audience and the artists to connect. And that’s not in a barren field or in a hot car park. It is about finding a space that is lovely for the artists as well as the audience. One that has an impact on both. As you enter the park, you are saying- ‘Ah’… You feel the change.”

“After a now 33 year history of that connection with Botanic Park, going into 2024 we didn’t want a sense of repeating. It wasn’t about not having artists like Florence, or taking it back to its roots, or whatever. But it’s about having an eclectic program that extends from the variously known, to the unknown, to as far around the planet as you can find - and inviting the audience to come and discover them. That goes right back to 1992 when people knew some names – like Crowded House – but also many artists [Sheila Chandra, Youssou N Dour and Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan] people would never have come across otherwise. That sense of musical and cultural discovery is intrinsic to it. “

“And so far, sales are really positive. We are not at the madness of a year ago - when we were nearly sold out by January ! But we are looking at a good capacity and response to the program has also been very positive.”

One change people can expect is the layout of the park. “We have reconfigured the layout quite a lot. It’s been on the cards for a while for a number of reasons. It came to a head last year because of capacity issues. But what’s happened is that, over time, the trees have grown and there is less space; not for the people, but for the stalls and infrastructure. We want people to come and have a park experience not an ‘industrial’ experience. So how do we find more green space for people ?”

Solutions were sought with various permutations – moving stalls and the Kidzone. Some plans were different but no better. Scobie and the team have opted for a market strip along Plane Tree Drive – part of the rationale being to improve crowd circulation. The Zoo Stage will be moved to allow more people and elevated for better sightlines. There will be significantly more toilets– and wardens to direct traffic to vacant facilities to ensure efficiency of flow, so to speak.

Also, because the amazing crowd for Florence pushed way back into the trees, clearer walkways (lit for visibility) will mean easier and better defined access through the throng at busy times.

As for the program, Scobie is particularly pleased with the strolling park street theatre entertainment which he describes as one of the most extensive lists so far. French company Cie L’Immediate will explore levitation , South Korean company Mul Jil will present *Elephants Laugh,* a study in immersion, and, each day, Handspring Puppet Company, in collaboration with our local company, Slingsby, will parade their giant creations for all to enjoy.

Gratte Ciel will return with their aerial choreography in *Rozeo* and another highlight will be Streb Extreme Action. Founded by Elizabeth Streb in 1985, the ensemble bring a mix of gymnastics, dance, and extreme sport. They are also presenting *Time Machine* later, in the final week of the Adelaide Festival.

Another Scobie pick is Omar Rajeh/ Maqamat with *Beytna* (meaning “home”) featuring four choreographers and four musicians from Lebanon, Japan, Palestine, and Togo celebrating hospitality and food and shared life experiences.

Always significant in the WOMAD program are First Nations musicians . Scobie mentions Wildfire Manwurrk from Arnhem Land, singing 80s rock riffs with lyrics sung in ancient languages from before invasion. Rob Thomas, Dean Brady and new talent, Noongar artist, Bumpy will all perform. From the region come Maori performer A.Girl, and T’Honi, (also from Aotearoa), Tio from Vanuatu and Ju Ben from Fiji.

Women feature prominently in WOMADadelaide yet again . Portguese *fado* singer, Marta Pereira da Costa will perform twice, Irish musician Sharon Shannon will bring her Big Band, Tunisian Emel Mathlouthi returns, and UK singer-songwriter, Corrine Bailey Rae. Brooklyn based and Pakistani born, Arooj Aftab will be keenly anticipated, as will much admired Australian musician, Jen Cloher.

I asked Associate Director, Annette Tripodi for her tips this year. These include Som Rompe Pera , a group of former street musicians from Mexico, the Mauskovic Dance Band from the Netherlands, whom she describes as an “irresistibly dancey, slinky sound “, and from Zambia, WITCH, making their Australian debut . Also getting special mention is the intriguing Moonlight Benjamin from Haiti/France, Tripodi describes her as having “a raw brooding presence, a genuine *vodou* princess who says she sings to heal people.”

There are many musicians that promise to captivate us. UK Jazz drummer, Yussef Dayes has a brilliant, versatile band. Dayes’ marvellous 2023 solo release, *Black Classical Music,* with its echoes of Mwandishi Herbie Hancock and early Weather Report, is surely destined to become a new jazz classic.

From the recent past come Jose Gonzalez, the prolific Nitin Sawhney, and the enveloping trip-hop soul of Morcheeba

As always, the late Friday night spot (the traditional Nusrat Hour) will feature rich meditative performances – this time from sarod player, Pt Te Jendra Narayan and a violinist with a famous surname, Ambi Subranamiam.

For Ian Scobie, it is pleasing to be hosting some of the eminent musicians in the WOMAD family. Baaba Maal from Senegal will be majestic on Sunday night. Pioneer of the sixties Tropicalia movement in Brazil, seller of millions of records, and former Minister of Culture, Gilbert Gil’s Saturday night performance will also be essential attending. And, after repeated delays over more than four years, Ziggy Marley, scion of the legendary Bob, will headline on Monday night.

To conclude, Scobie wants to mention the Planet Talks speakers program produced by Rob Law. It features, among others, former President of Kiribate, Anote Tong, ex-senator and fearless eco-warrior, Bob Brown and whale scientist, Dr Vanessa Pirotta. Of the environmental talks, Scobie emphasises the need for persistence and hope – “The continuing journey to find carbon neutral answers, rather than ‘the sky’s falling in!’”

“How do you empower people?”, he asks, “constant crisis is not helpful.”

Ian Scobie then returns to talking about the power of music, its pleasures and its reminder of the variety of the world. “We can’t live in perpetual crisis and outrage. We have to find a way through. Art and music and discussion help people to reassess the world and their place in it. “

As he would say- “touch wood.”

Located at Tainmuntilla/Botanic Park, WOMADelaide 2024 will run from March 8 -11.

Published on *The Barefoot Review* February 23, 2024

Goodbye Lindita

Published: 2024-03-01 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Described as a visual meditation on mourning, *Goodbye Lindita* eloquently, and sometimes convulsively, expresses feeling and wonder about the mystery of death - without uttering a single word.

Written by Murray Bramwell

“I feel like mourning has a silent, almost suffocating quality,“ Mario Banushi writes in the program notes, “This is why it is a performance without words.”

Conceived and directed by Banushi, *Goodbye Lindita* may be wordless but it has plenty to say. Inspired, or perhaps provoked, by the death of his stepmother (followed three days later by his father’s death) he has fashioned a work of impressive originality. With only his second stage production as a director, Banushi, Albanian born and now Athens based, is surely, at aged 26, already an exceptional theatre maker .

As the curtain rises on the first tableau we are seeing a theatrical sensibility of extraordinary assurance. The set, designed by Sotiris Melanos, is a single room extending across the entire stage. It is mundane and the people in it are listless and restless. Two are mindlessly watching a vacuously perky TV program but it seems to soothe, or at least distract them. Another is lying on a large quilted bed completely covered and still. Later a woman starts folding clothes and vacuuming. They move slowly and in the quiet we hear their feet scuff.

The room is dim but, by the window, rays of sunlight diffuse through the slatted blinds and curtains. Another light captures a row of coats on hooks as if it were a vignette in a Vermeer painting, or a more mellow Hopper. Designed by Tasos Palaioroutas, the lighting is as surprising as it is exquisite.

The people are both agitated and immobilised by grief. There is a boredom mingled with the sadness, frustration with this hiatus before things burst into action. Which they do when what looks like an ordinary dresser is wheeled into centre stage and unfolded like a wooden puzzle to reveal the naked body of the deceased Lindita.

The women begin to wail and writhe and touch her skin. They sprinkle earth on her and rub her. Then they carry her to where the bed has been dismantled and morphed into a bath where, in lighting reminiscent of Titian or Tintoretto, they take turns at bathing her hair and body.

She then stands naked and silently in front of us for what seems the longest time. Banushi has a canny instinct for silence and stillness when so few directors would dare risk such longeurs.

Banushi creates a familiar tableau of mourners preparing the loved one for the funeral . They stand Lindita (memorably played by Alexandra Hasani) upright and begin to clothe her in an ivory satin dress, with a pinkish sash and layers of traditional necklaces and a face mask. It is an archaic peasant ceremony but there is nothing anthropological about it. After Lindita is laid to rest, in a directors’ cameo, Banushi climbs on stage and lays armloads of flowers around her bed. It is an actual moment of homage to his stepmother, and poignant for being so.

Goodbye Lindita is interspersed with music, images and themes which disrupt and reframe much of what we think we are seeing. Emmanouel Rovithis’ inventive, and often astonishing, score and sound, contrasts the stage silences with a bewildering range of trumpets, percussion (including the graunching and tormenting of found objects) sublime choral excerpts, folk music, and ominous vocals, synth washes and other electronica.

These sounds intersect with, but also undercut or contradict, what we are seeing. But these tensions relate to Banushi’s preoccupation with what lies between this world and the possible next. That line which is crossed by the dead but also beckons for those left behind.

The play is full of weirdness and portents. An African woman with a guitar sings outside the window early in the play and returns later as a Black Madonna. A traditional iconic painting of Mary is removed from the wall to reveal a portal through which one can climb. In a Dali-esque moment a hand reaches out of the wall and caresses a weeping woman. Late in the play several of the women engage in frenzied naked Dionysian gyrations and contortions.

Goodbye Lindita is a reminder of the inventive possibilities of theatre. We can only hope that, when Banushi completes the final work of his trilogy, it will be performed here also. In the meantime we have already seen a 2024 Festival highlight.

Goodbye Lindita is playing at the Dunstan Playhouse until March 3.

Adelaide Festival - I Hide in Bathrooms

Published: 2024-03-06 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

I Hide in Bathrooms Astrid Pill and Collaborators Vitalstatistix Waterside.

I Hide in Bathrooms, we are told, by an offstage voice, is “based loosely on a true-ish story” but it is also “made-uppish”. We know from the program notes that this excellent theatre work had its beginnings when devisor and performer Astrid Pill became preoccupied with the notion of the death of a life partner, in response to the experiences of people in her intimate circle.

But it is not a memoir, nor even a single story. It is a discursive riff on death in all its forms and the effect on those who are left behind. It is also a wryly satiric exploration of the ambiguous etiquette of grief and mourning - and the mixed messages that arise.

The first we see of the performer is her looming large in monochrome on a video screen, artfully designed by Jason Sweeney, and enveloped by Zoe Barry’s surging, disconcertingly roiling musical score. Then she muses on what it means when you lose your Other Half. Are you sliced down the middle, cut off at the legs ? It is both facetious and serious – who are we, and who are we entitled to be, when our beloved is no longer in the world ?

In another shape-shifting segue, dressed in widow’s black, Pill stands at a microphone, addressing us as attendees at a funeral. “I am not myself” she exclaims, weaving slightly as she brandishes a wine glass and reminding us again that this is more made-uppishness. Is she crying ? Is she supposed to ? What if she doesn’t ? Warned not to wear mascara, she nevertheless smears it copiously as if in some arcane ritual. I’ve been a widow for a week, she announces. Should she start casting around the room for a replacement partner? Putting it out there, so to speak.

Pill howls with grief – and behind her the projected text, which operates throughout the performance, implores “Please Stop” as if it is in poor form. She performs a variety of zany charades and the texts explain them. Death by labradoodle, death by stretching, by Instagram, by the Absoluteness of Love, death by bus.

The narrative bobs and weaves. Pill describes an experience. When I found him, she recalls, he looked like he was sleeping lying on the ground. She calls the ambos and they close his eyes. We draw close, sensing this might be some true-ish detail we can fasten on to. But it is not. She quickly follows with similarly plausible reports of a drowning, and a heart attack. Zoe Barry’s powerful score for cello churns and chimes, the repeated reverb bowing becoming urgent and disturbing.

Director and co-devisor Ingrid Voorendt (Pill’s long-term collaborator right back to the Ladykillers days) deftly ensures that the shifts and elisions are crisp and telling. The tempo is enquiring but never quite explanatory, or resolved. These questions of options, obligations, and possible free choices, hover like riddles and conundrums.

Renata Henschke’s set is intriguing. On each side of the stage are what look like large stacks of boxes draped in cloth, above the stage is a huge enigmatic lump – a boulder of Damocles perhaps ? Certainly something pending and inevitable.

The lighting, by Sue Grey-Gardner, is subtle and soothing, creating buttery cameos and splendidly serving the performance. When the cover sheets come off, revealing pyramids of perspex boxes filled with glass - vases, lamps, dishes and stemmed wine flutes- the stage is both subtly illuminated and made intimate, enhancing the sometimes poetic strangeness in Pill’s narrative.

There is so much to admire in this production. Its complexity and avoidance of platitude, its risk and ambition, make this a captivating seventy minutes. Astrid Pill is outstanding. Her choreography, her deadpan humour, her wit, and her singing. The droll, but moving, chorus from “The Great Pretender”, her lambent rendering of “The Lyke-Wake Dirge” and finally, the spine-tingling “You Gotta Walk that Lonesome Valley” all contribute to making this world premiere production another Festival success.

I Hide in Bathrooms is playing at Waterside, 11 Nile Street, Port Adelaide until March 16.

murraybramwell.com March 6, 2024.

Adelaide Festival - The Threepenny Opera

Published: 2024-03-08 *Adelaide Festival · Music*

Adelaide Festival Music Theatre: *The Threepenny Opera*

Barrie Kosky's version of *The Threepenny Opera* has had a haircut and a makeover but the satire is still in there, along with the comedy, and Kurt Weill's splendid music.

Written by Murray Bramwell

The Threepenny Opera is just four years short of its hundredth birthday and it has had a long history of popular successes and mixed receptions. In Berlin, in 1928, it did poorly when it opened and then became popular with the smart set, who seemed oblivious to its bitter satire. Kurt Weill's catchy, inventive music was the kicker – "Mack the Knife" became a popular hit, along with "The Cannon Song". Bertolt Brecht's text, extensively derived from Elisabeth Hauptmann's translation of John Gay's 18th century satire, *The Beggars Opera,* often came a poor second.

It is, in various proportions, a play, an opera, a song cycle, a vaudeville turn, and a caustic commentary on poverty and social inequality. In an interview Barrie Kosky called it a never-ending labyrinth: "Because once you open one door and solve one problem, another problem rears its ugly head…Any director or actor who tells you this piece is not really tricky is lying."

In 2021 Kosky began preparation of the production we are now seeing at the Adelaide Festival. Working with Brecht's own company, the prestigious Berliner Ensemble, he spent eight weeks in rehearsal and then, after a run-through, found himself lost in the labyrinth. He scrapped costumes, re-did scenes, and began again. That was January and by August he had made major changes.

What we saw on opening night in Adelaide is a fascinating mix of Barrie and Bertolt. The play is all there, but with a terser translation in the surtitles and moved well clear of any visible beggars, or underclass affectation. There are notable Kosky signatures. The stage curtain is dazzling tinsel through which, initially, the actors peer. The opening "Ballad of Mack the Knife" is sung (brilliantly) by the disembodied, glitter-speckled head of Dennis Jankowiak, (aka The Moon over Soho) three metres above the stage.

When Rebecca Ringst's set design is eventually revealed it looks like a giant jungle gym, or maybe a Bauhaus Rubix cube. Strikingly lit by Urlich Eh, it is a steel geometric cage structure into which the performers can climb and move, perform duets and directly address the audience.

The ensemble performances are splendid. Key to the play are the awful Peachums. Jonathan Jeremiah (the impressive Tilo Nest, dressed in a black velvet suit) runs The Beggars Friend Ltd, a franchise of registered supplicants collecting money on pitiful retainers. He expounds his mercenary and mercantile philosophy in his "Morning Hymn" and "The Song of the Insufficiency of Human Endeavour".

His wife Celia (Constanze Becker) is also a ruthless driving force in the action. Dressed in a long fur coat, her hair in a dark bo, she looks like a figure in a Kirchner painting. Becker, like Nest, is a compelling performer. Celia sneers through "The Ballad of Sexual Obsession" but she cannot prevail with daughter Polly, (Cynthia Micas) dressed like a party girl in white taffeta, and head over high heels for Mack the shark.

Julia Berger, as Spelunken Jenny, performs a knock-out version of "Pirate Jenny" but I still prefer the Mark Blitzstein lyrics to the Mannheim and Willett version. As Chief of London police, Tiger Brown, Kathrin Wehlisch provides goofy slapstick especially in the second Act. Kosky takes Brecht's admiration for Chaplin at his word and also lets Laura Balzer, as Lucy, a little too much off her zany tether, although her "Jealousy Duet" with Micas is vintage screwball.

And, as Macheath, Gabriel Schneider is the very model of the modern psychopath. With his slicked back hair, skinny lounge suit and sporting heavy mascara, he looks like James Dean or the young Elvis. We can see why he is catnip to women and we glimpse his lethal proclivities. His duet of "The Cannon Song" with Wehlisch is a highlight, as is his dubiously penitential "Ballad for Forgiveness" before the outlandish, but welcome, *deux ex machina* to conclude.

Also brilliant in this vivacious production is the band. Led by conductor, Adam Benzwi (also on piano) the six musicians play Kurt Weill's jazz inflected, suavely melodic music to perfection. Kosky has declared Weill as significant to music theatre as Wagner and these musicians further that claim.

With this production Kosky has navigated the labyrinth. Some Brechtians might say it is too frothy for the master's voice; not enough vehemence. Too much schtick and not enough lehrstucke. But there is something exhilarating about producing this well-poised transgressive comedy in the heart of the Berliner Ensemble. When he was there, Kosky admitted to carving his (very small) initials on Brecht's writing desk. This production is his signature writ large. And sometimes it's OK to be more Barrie than Bert.

The Threepenny Opera is playing at Her Majesty's until March 10.

Adelaide Festival - Qui a tue mon pere (Who killed my father)

Published: 2024-03-09 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Adelaide Festival Theatre : *Qui a tue mon pere (Who killed my father)*

In his compelling monologue Edouard Louis meticulously describes a childhood ruined by poverty, abuse, and alienation. He blames his father but comes to realise there are also much larger social and structural cruelties in play.

Reviewed by Murray Bramwell

In the preface to his harrowing 2018 memoir *Qui a tue mon pere,* Edouard Louis hypothesises.

“If this were a text for the theatre, here is how it would begin: A father and son stand a few metres apart in a vast empty space…The son speaks, and only the son, and this does violence to them both: the father is never allowed to tell his own story, while the son longs for a response that he will never receive”.

Now standing on the stage of the Dunstan Theatre, with an adaptation of the book, co-devised and directed by Thomas Ostermeier, Edouard Louis takes a further step to reveal, not only the grim reality of his family’s predicament, but the separate and particular tragedies for each of them.

As we file into the theatre Louis is already waiting for us. Seated at a table with a reading lamp and a laptop, he is engrossed in a task. Has he already begun writing his sixth book at aged 31 ? we briefly wonder. When he rises and moves to the microphone stand at centre front stage, it starts to feel like a TED talk.

He begins as the book does – with a quote about racism from the theorist Ruth Gilmore. “Racism is the exposure of certain populations to premature death. The same definition holds with regard to male privilege, to hatred of homosexuality or trans people, to domination by class – to social and political oppression of all kinds .”

Louis is using a distancing convention that Brecht would recognize – that zoom lens which moves close-in to particular miseries, and then pulls back to show they are the result of deliberate political and organisational intention.

Behind him the drably muted monochrome back-projections (from videographers Sebastien Dupouey and Marie Sanchez) locate us in the vicinity of Hallencourt in Northern France, close to the infamous Somme, where Louis, (aka.Eddy Belleguele) grew up in a toxic, violent, homophobic family and spent every fibre of his being escaping it at the age of eighteen.

He is describing a recent return, met at the door by a father he doesn’t recognise. He can hardly walk or breathe. He is shadow of the bullish vigorous father he once was. Proud of his masculinity, his physical strength. “Don’t be a girl, don’t be a faggot” was the catch cry persecuting a mere boy, bullied and despised for his difference.

The narrative draws energetic contrasts between Louis and his father’s diminished world. When Louis stages dress-ups in a rolled up red Pokemon T-shirt and improvises extravagant lip-sync performances of the Barbie song or Whitney Houston’s “I Will Always Love You” he fills the stage with dance moves and twirls, serenading his father’s empty leather chair in the hope of his attention and approval.

While the book provides extended and harrowing accounts of Eddy’s persecution at school, from his step-brother, from his abused and beaten mother, and his bitter drunken father’s physical and psychic violence, in the stage adaptation there is more respite.

More emphasis is given to anecdotes which mitigate the father’s infamy. Like when he relents and buys a VHS of *The Bodyguard* which his son then proceeds to watch ad nauseum. The father, a keen dancer in his youth, finally reluctantly admits his son is a talented performer.

Which indeed he is. Deftly directed by Schaubuhne Berlin director Ostermeier, Louis is not only an eminent writer, but also a performer with presence . His assured, splendidly cadenced delivery has a calm, confiding quality. It lends, by its restraint, more intensity to its revelation and polemic.

Subtly lit by Erich Schneider with an often subliminal but strategically insistent score by composer Sylvain Jacques, this production is admirably constructed.

It is notable that the play’s title - *Qui a tue mon pere (Who killed my father)* has no question mark. That is because the author is in no doubt who is to blame.

I am not sure if he needs to wear a Zorro mask, a cape, and a clown’s cone hat to deliver it, but Louis’s concluding speech, as in the book, is a startling indictment of the policies (of four French presidents) which have destroyed his father’s health and well-being. Only in his fifties, he is broken and near death. His back crushed in a factory accident, he is then forced out to work as a street sweeper. His son, in indignation, names names.

The first night audience cheers Edouard Louis for such engaging and timely analysis and candour. But it is also an indictment we should reflect on much closer to home - long after our applause ends.

Qui a tue mon pere (Who killed my father) is playing at the Dunstan Theatre until March 10.

Fringe: Dear Diary

Published: 2025-02-20 *Adelaide Fringe · Theatre*

Adelaide Fringe

Theatre: *Dear Diary*

A diary from a younger self is explored and reinterpreted in storytelling and song. It is a vivid portrait of the artist as a young woman.

Written by Murray Bramwell

“My name is Kay (says Kay Proudlove) and I want to tell you a story.” And it is a beguiling, pensive and candid one. *Dear Diary* is a history -or rather, a herstory - based on a relic from the turn of the century, her diary as a 13 year old.

Kay gets a phone call from her father with an important announcement. She has to clear out her bedroom in the family home in Wollongong -because her mother wants to use it as a sewing room. This means going through the books and clothes and precious stuff that make up her early life, the mementos that are both pleasing and disconcerting. Happy recollections and unwelcome reminders.

Most notable is her diary, charting the highs and lows, a chronicle of her emerging self. It lists her ambitions . “I want to be a model. Or a vet.”

She wants eight cats, six-pack abs and to smoke Winfield Blues.

There is also her Book of Guys. She has a crush on Jacob and keeps his discarded ice cream spoon like a holy relic. Her commentary is sharp and quotable – “He left a trail of broken hearts -and Lynx Africa”

There are reminders of celebrity crushes and drafts of letters unsent. She discovers *The Lord of the Rings* movies and softly croons with her guitar “No-one can love you like I could – Elijah Wood. “

The Spice Girls also feature . Kay and her friend form a Spice Girls tribute duo called Gorgeous. She has screenshots of hand-written lyrics and costume designs. Kay wants to be Baby Spice. Not Ginger Spice – the one who left the band because of “artistic differences” and because she was exhausted from endless crash dieting.

Dear Diary can be fond and endearing but also disturbed and emotionally revealing. The social and sexual pressures in late high school, binge drinking and treacherous mean girl peer exclusion – these are examined with regret and some dismay. Proudlove’s story also moves closer to her present life as an indie musician and songwriter- and the precarious situation for artists following their teenage dreams and ambitions.

She also talks about the tyrannies of self-image. Never mawkishly or self-pitying but with sorrowful recognition at how much these things weigh us down and waste our time. *Dear Diary* is deftly managed, winningly presented, and will strike a tuneful chord with many audiences. Especially those who remember those Spice Girls – Baby and Ginger.

Four Stars

Dear Diary, presented by the Merrigong Theatre Company, is playing in The Studio, Holden Street Theatres from February 18 to March 9.

Fringe: Shellshocked

Published: 2025-02-20 *Adelaide Fringe · Theatre*

Adelaide Fringe

Theatre: *Shellshocked*

This excellent new English play from the Edinburgh Fringe, written and directed by Philip Stokes and featuring his son Jack Stokes, is an intriguing and disconcerting meeting of damaged minds.

Written by Murray Bramwell

The scene is an artist's studio. There is a large blank easel in the centre of the stage with paint-spattered tarps suspended behind it. There is a desk with drawers and, beside a well-used drinks cabinet, stands a disheveled man - bearded, past his prime, bulging out of his Fair Isle jumper and leaning heavily on a stick.

The painter's name is Lupine and his wolfish nature is soon to be revealed when a young man named Wesley Hepton visits for a job interview as artist's assistant.

World War 1 has just ended and Wesley has returned a hero but is also suffering from the dread of war. Shell-shocked, he is withdrawn and depressed, dissociated from the Northern English town where he grew up.

Shellshocked canvasses questions about the purpose of art, the indifference of the artist, the horror and futility of war, and the psychopathy of mandated murder. Wesley has been scarred and near ruined by his experience. Nevertheless, Lupine, the painter of Labrador dogs, envies Wesley's portfolio of battlefield images and despises his own suburban mediocrity.

The dialogue is mercurial and often cruel. It is also satiric and grimly funny - a mix of Pinter, Joe Orton, and even a dash of Alan Bennett. And the performances are terrific.

Lee Bainbridge's Lupine is wheedling, perversely dominating, and forensically interrogating - until Jack Stokes's memorable Wesley, in his baggy, oversized suit, desperate for employment, and exhausted by military bastardry, begins to turn the tables.

Shellshocked is itself a series of theatrical assaults, after-images, and troubling contradictions - which only accelerate as matters get further out of hand. Philip Stokes (who, with his son Jack, also presented the brilliant 2023 Fringe production *Jesus, Jane, Mother and Me*) has directed his own text - best capturing both its intelligence and originality.

Selected from the Edinburgh Fringe for inclusion in Holden Street Theatre's consistently excellent international program, this is undoubtedly a highlight and the Fringe has hardly begun.

Five Stars

Shellshocked is playing at The Arch, Holden Street Theatres until March 23. See the Fringe Guide for details.

Fringe: Why I Stuck a Flare Up My Ar** For England

Published: 2025-02-20 *Adelaide Fringe · Theatre*

Adelaide Fringe

Theatre: *Why I Stuck a Flare Up My Ar** For England*

In a frenetic, perceptive, often brilliant sixty minutes, writer and performer Alex Hill explores the agonies, ecstasies and desperate endgames of a London football fanatic.

Written by Murray Bramwell

Bursting into the confines of the Holden Street Studio comes Billy. Amped up, dressed in his national team's strip, he is ready for battle - for England, St George, and Harry Maguire. So ready, in fact, that in his manic patriotism, outside Wembley alongside other ticketless fans, he jams a flare in his rear end and lights it like a maniacal candle prayer for victory.

Billy is a fiction based on a crazy prank which went viral on the internet in 2020 when England lost on penalties to Italy in the UEFA Euro final. No one knows anything about the actual bum rocket geezer, but Alex Hill has built a story about football, friendship, the need to belong, and the reckless self-destruction of male anger and alienation.

Against a backdrop consisting of a giant mosaic of English red cross flags, Billy describes a life in search of purpose and meaning. His mother has died, and he helps his father run a hair salon. It is a job but he is a sweeper, not a stylist. He has a childhood friend, Adam with whom he shares a sacred passion for football. Like Nick Hornby in his book *Fever Pitch*, Hill admires the bonds and camaraderie of football fandom.

But when the drinks at the pub where the Wimbledon FC fans hang out lead to escalating lager frenzies, turbo-charged with cocaine, Billy and the reluctant Adam have morphed into football hooligans. Hanging out with Winegum and his crew, and brawling with rival fans.

Crisply directed by Sean Turner, Alex Hill's engaging, upbeat portrayal of a London lad is inflected with pathos and unease from the outset. We follow the disintegration of Billy's relationship with his girlfriend Daisy – and also, Adam - and we are unprepared for the consequences. This perceptive, affecting and keenly judged monologue is about a lot more than England losing a cup on penalties. It is sending up a signal saying help is needed.

Five Stars (and a rocket)

*Why I Stuck a Flare Up My Ar** is playing in the Studio, Holden Street Theatres until March 23.

Preview Interview: WOMADelaide 2025

Published: 2025-02-26 *WOMADelaide · Music*

Adelaide Festival

Music

Preview Interview WOMADelaide 2025

Now one of Australia's most durable outdoor festivals, WOMADelaide prepares for another four day event featuring music and performances that are, you might say, out of this World. Associate Director, Annette Tripodi talks about the line-up for 2025.

Written by Murray Bramwell

WOMADelaide, with its rather odd portmanteau name, has become a very familiar fixture in Botanic Park in the second weekend in March. This year will be its 28th iteration and it continues from strength to strength. Introduced in 1992 by Rob Brookman as part of his Adelaide Festival program, it remains, 33 years on, a mainstay of the festival calendar, and an amiable communal ritual for successive generations of local and interstate audiences.

Its origins were tentative and serendipitous. Brookman, along with Ian Scobie and other partners in Arts Projects Australia (APA) its production company, made contact with Thomas Brooman, director of the UK WOMAD (acronym for World of Music, Arts and Dance) and many of the performers from the English version came to Adelaide.

Most were contracted to singer-songwriter, Peter Gabriel's RealWorld music label, an adventurous project recording the sounds of artists as various as the Qawwali exponent, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Afrobeat bandleaders Remmy Ongala and Youssou N' Dour, chanteuse Sheila Chandra, The Drummers of Burundi, and Tenores di Bitti, singing traditional fishing songs from Sardinia.

The first WOMADelaide is remembered vividly by those who attended and the annual selection and presentation of artists from the global music diaspora continues to the present day.

Establishing the location in Botanic Park, so close to the CBD, was, it now seems, amazingly fortuitous. Although originally planned to be held in Belair National Park, because of BOM warnings of extreme fire danger, there was a last minute decision to relocate. Arrangements were made to have access to Botanic Park and the venue is now synonymous with WOMADelaide and a significant reason for its enduring success.

Associate Director, Annette Tripodi joined WOMADelaide in 1997 as a volunteer artist minder, then got a four month contract with APA and, as she recalls - "One thing led to another. I was a lowly admin worker supporting Rob and Ian. Things developed and I focused on the Australian program. After a restructure with WOMAD overseas, Ian and I started to work more closely on the international program.

"It has really evolved and we are a good team. Sometimes it is yin and yang – he will like it, and I might screw my face up. And vice versa . The program has benefited from this . I also think I have, over time, developed a very strong instinct for what's going to work in the festival – whether I like it personally, or not."

So how has the program been assembled this year ?

"I would say assembling it earlier than previous years was helpful in getting artists over the line. But also, so many festivals were not happening and announcing cancellations, we had many more proposals from performers than usual. Conservatively, I'd say we had more than 800 proposals coming our way. Which ended up with 75 or so acts in the program, so the number of great artists that we couldn't include was also higher.

"Every WOMADelaide is a mysterious process. You have a plan and you are following your heart and your passion projects and – I say this every year - some of them fall over, and some happen so quickly you can't believe it. Also, you always want things wrapped up by the end of October - and then something juicy comes in and you try and squeeze that in too. It is a fascinating process, even to me after all these years."

Asked how the event has maintained its following over such a long time Tripodi notes that for festivals to succeed they need their points of difference – "WOMADelaide tries to have a completely different program every year and when performers are returning there is usually quite a time lapse in between.

"We also have a huge proportion of artists who have never played in Adelaide, or Australia, who actually have a minimal imprint in the minds of Australian audiences, even though they have huge followings in their own countries and internationally. We are very conscious that we have to be different and all the offstage artistry – the daily park events, displays and acrobatics – are all becoming more important. "

So what are personal highlights and special favourites for Annette Tripodi in this year's line-up ? The first mention is the Friday opening performer, English singer, PJ Harvey.

"We have tried several times to book her before and the time was not right. I was back on the case quickly and, as luck would have it, she was touring heavily and performing at Glastonbury and the Primavera festival in Barcelona - and by all accounts was extraordinary. Her booking was confirmed while I was on holidays in Croatia ! I am thrilled .

"She's important in music history. Her base is very diverse, as is her catalogue. It is unusual to have someone of her stature opening the festival. If you can excite those who already know and love her, *and* introduce her to a whole new audience – that's what you want."

Other highlights on opening night include prolific composer, performer, DJ and cultural commentator, Nitin Sawhney. 'It is wonderful to have him back," says Tripodi "he has recovered his health since he withdrew last March. He is an amazing man. I don't how he manages so many things – film compositions, work with orchestras, he is so creative and diligent."

And, definitely putting the "D" in WOMAD is Bangarra Dance with their work, *The Light Inside* a collaboration with Maori choreographer, Moss Te Ururangi Patterson and Bangarra's Deborah Brown. Tripodi notes this is the third time Bangarra has performed at the festival since 1999.

"This is another point of difference. There isn't another outdoor music festival that puts on two performances from what is arguably Australia's best contemporary dance company. The company loves doing it because in two nights they can be seen by maybe five thousand people, many of whom would not otherwise have had the chance."

Also performing is Adelaide's Ruby Award winning Restless Dance Theatre with their work, *Seeing Through Darkness,* based on Expressionist painter Georges Rouault, linking his preoccupation with the imperfections of the body with the experience of disability. *Seeing Through Darkness* features each day in The Studio located at Adelaide Botanic High School..

In addition to the dance companies are the strolling performers moving about the park. Last year the Handspring Puppet Company paraded a large elephant through the crowd. This time, Cie Paris Benares -*Chamoh* will present a giant 3X3 metre camel to amaze and delight both the young and the not so young. Yoann Bourgeois Art Company, recent collaborators with Harry Styles will attend with their eye-popping *Unreachable Suspension Point* . Spectacular UK company, The Dream Engine will fill the night sky with *Helioscope* - acrobats suspended, soaring, and spiralling from a giant helium balloon.

And ilotopie- Les Gens de Couler return, painted in second skins of bright pinks, greens and blues, like living garden sculptures or psychedelic sprites. When they last visited Adelaide in 1992 they were the centre of controversy and prudish complaint. Only a timely change in local regulations kept them from further police attention. Director Ian Scobie well remembers the kerfuffle and recalls the prompt intervention by the then Arts Minister Diana Laidlaw- in the name of performance art.

Through the years WOMADelaide has presented a rich and varied program of First Nations performers and this year is no exception. Tripodi is quick to mention rising talent Eleanor Jawurlngali performing on Saturday with cellist Stephanie Arnold and Mick Turner, guitarist with Dirty Three. Also featuring will be the Central Australian Aboriginal Women's Choir.

"The power of so many voices is wonderful" enthuses Tripodi, "They are singing church hymns but being in language and sung by these beautiful older women is very affecting. I think every festival needs a large choir. They open the day on Saturday and Monday and I think that will set the tone for what then follows."

Also appearing at the festival are the Andrew Gurruwiwi Band, a funk outfit from North East Arnhem Land, and blues and roots singer Emily Wurramara, from Groote Eylandt, performing her 2024 album NARA. Arrente hip-hop artist, Bousta (a graduate from the professional development WOMADelaide Academy, in conjunction with Northern Sound System) will feature in the Frome Park Pavilion.

Another Academy graduate, Sri Lankan /Australian singer songwriter Meena De Silva has also been selected for the main program and performs on Friday night. Continuing from last year, other Academy musicians will have their own stage throughout the weekend.

Saturday night promises to be a high energy time and Tripodi singles out livewires Delgres from France, led by singer Pascal Danae and featuring Rafgee playing bass lines on the sousaphone. Star of the dancehall-reggae sector, Queen Omega, from Trinidad & Tobago, promises much on Stage 3, and WOMAD favourites, Goran Brecovic & His Wedding & Funeral Band return to headline on the Foundation stage. As Tripodi observes – "He's the kind of artist who can get on stage and get the party going immediately." The inventive Irish electronic pop performer, Roisin Murphy will close the night on Stage 2.

In the voluminous program it is again notable seeing so many women performers at WOMADelaide. "It's very much a personal aim of mine to make sure this happens," comments Tripodi, "and it has been a feature of the festival since the beginning."

Not to be missed are singer, producer and synthesiser designer, Ela Minus from Colombia, Portuguese fado singer, Mariza , Cuban cellist Ana Carla Maza, Inuk artist Elisapie, from Canada, who performs Debby Harry and Cindy Lauper songs in the ancient Inuktitut dialect, dance vocalist Sofia Kourtesis from Peru, and Grammy winning, new generation Queen of the Afrobeats, Yemi Alade from Nigeria - whose collaborations with Angelique Kidjo, Femi One and, Beyonce for *The Lion King*, are legend.

Performing on Saturday on the Foundation Stage, on Monday on Stage 2, and doing a workshop in between, is the Palestinian/Jordanian hip-hop electronica Shamstep band, 47Soul, whose 2024 tour was postponed, causing controversy and protests at the time.

Tripodi is keen to focus on the band's return next week – nine years after they last performed at WOMADelaide –adding that their performances will be seen by many as an opportunity to show solidarity for the Palestinian cause and to celebrate their music. "It will be," she says, "an absolute pleasure to welcome them back."

The Sunday program features a number of once-only performances including avant-garde jazz outfit, the Sun Ra Arkestra, founded in the US in the mid 1950s and led by composer-keyboardist, Sun Ra until his death in 1993. Since then, saxophonist Marshall Allen has been front man. He recently recorded a new album, *New Dawn,* at the age of 100. Marshall will not be touring with them, but this band, regarded as the pioneers of "Afrofuturism", will be a visually astonishing, musically challenging, 5.30pm sensation on the Foundation stage.

Of US indie singer John Grant, Tripodi says "I think he is one of the cleverest lyricists out there. I listened to his albums since he last played here in 2012. His new release is more electronic, but the lyrics are still savage and funny -and he has that rich distinctive voice."

Adelaide musicians, The Lofty Mountain Band will play at the Zoo stage. "They remind me of the *O Brother Where Art Thou ?* musicians" Tripodi observes. "Led by Max Savage, they feature beautiful banjo and mandolin, plus two outstanding women vocalists". Other Adelaide musicians appearing this year include singer guitarist Dustyn, and Kara Manansala and Ms Chipeta (both by arrangement with Nexus Arts).

Some of the memorable WOMAD experiences have been the late night seated events featuring more intimate, contemplative sounds. It began with the Sufi chanting from Nusrat and the violin ragas of L. Subramaniam, and have continued on from there. This year, Indian musicians Satish Vyas and U Rajesh, playing santoor (hammered dulcimer) and mandolin respectively, will be accompanied by percussionists at Stage 7.

Another highlight will be renowned German keyboardist, Nils Frahm, closing Sunday night on the Foundation stage. His richly textured ambient blend of piano and electronica has links with the pensive piano of Joep Beving, who performed here at last year's Illuminate festival, as well currently performing Adelaide Festival musician, Hania Rani.

Says Tripodi – "When people talk about a pianist they have in mind a classical recital. Now they are taking the instrument to a new and younger audience. They are still as impressive technically, but it is from a different angle."

The final night program is also full of pleasures both familiar and new . Niti Sawhney performs again, as do Mariza and Emily Wurramara. There are also once-only performances from neo-folk trio, Bonny Light Horseman, UK jazz flautist, Shabaka Hutchings, and, from the US, Coachella performers and currently trending guitar, bass and drum trio, Khruangbin (which is Thai for 'airplane"). Scottish band Talisk, with their compelling Celtic electronica, will be over at Zoo and 47Soul will play once more at Stage 2 at 8.15.

Once the festival is under way, Tripodi likes to move among the crowd.

"I do about 60 kilometres," she admits, "I do laps of the site. I want to see people's reactions, artists I've never seen live before. I want the reward of seeing that it's going as it should be.

"When I do a schedule it is very much 'close my eyes and imagine - OK it's Sunday, you're under a tree, where do you want to go next ?'. I try to pick the highs and lows, the ebbs and flows, the shifts of energy in the program. You have to have light and shade. I want people to come to a stage with a generous, open mind and give it a go."

"There's a lot of love that goes into this event," Annette Tripodi says quietly. "I hope that's obvious to people when they come. It's not just 'whack a band on stage', it is to create an environment that's beautiful, that's safe and friendly, open and welcoming. And people are going to have their hearts, minds, and ears opened to the sounds and stories of the world."

WOMADelaide is playing at Botanic Park from March 7-10 as part of the 2025 Adelaide Festival.

Published February 28, 2025 by InDaily InReview in abridged and re-sequenced form.

I have posted the full text above to include more detail of the program.

Adelaide Festival: Hedwig and the Angry Inch

Published: 2025-02-26 *Adelaide Festival · Music · Cabaret*

Hedwig and the Angry Inch

Text by John Cameron Mitchell

Music and Lyrics by Stephen Trask

The Queens Theatre, Adelaide.

February 26, 2025

Murray Bramwell

Since we are talking about a punk rock musical, why not start with Plato's *Symposium ?*

"Love is born into every human being; it calls back the halves of our original nature together; it tries to make one out of two and heal the wound of human nature. Each of us, then, is a 'matching half' of a human whole...and each of us is always seeking the half that matches him." [/them]

In his outstanding music theatre work, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* playwright John Cameron Mitchell takes a sharply witty view of the duality in us all.

It is described, in detail, in his equally accomplished musical collaborator, Stephen Trask's song "Origin of Love" which proposes a time when "Folks roamed the earth/ Like big rolling kegs ./They had two sets of arms./They had two sets of legs"

They also had two faces and one giant head . And they knew nothing of love. It was before the Origin of Love - when Thor and Zeus and Osiris and the mighty hand of Jove all joined to sunder these composites and they became forever more- "lonely two-legged creatures."

This is the fabulously ludicrous mythic justification with which the lonely young boy Hansel, besieged in communist East Berlin, becomes Hedwig- his infamous, prowling, heartsick, altered ego.

Since its Off-Broadway inception in 1998, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, has, like *The Rocky Horror Show,* confronted the tyrannies of gender, and its binary imperatives, with defiance and a kind of raucous joy. When other Hedwig productions were cancelled in 2020 by purist agitators - for failing to meet stringent casting requirements - this latest outing boldly demonstrates that 2025 needs Hedwig's mutinous courage more than ever.

In the ancient shell of The Queens Theatre, co-directors Shane Anthony and Dino Dimitriadis have created rough theatre with style and flair. Jeremy Allen's set, (bathed in lighting wizard, Geoff Cobham's artfully grungy sprays and strobes) consists of a compact, circular steel performance stage, with a staircase at the back leading to a large mysterious door. .

A silvery, ruffled, tubular fabric creation hangs above the action like a giant lampshade – ready to be lowered over the band for quieter Hedwig reveries, or scrunched up into itself for the big show tune occasions.

The excellent band is already installed, dressed in Nicol & Ford's extravagantly distressed and patched denim, and building the expectation with slashing guitar and keyboard rock.

It is Hedwig time. Sporting a blonde Heidi wig rolled into two big bunches and a long pigtail, also in denim, fishnet, and platinum cowboy boots, is the star and engine of the show, Seann Miley Moore comes out roaring-

"Tear Me Down".

The transgressive challenges the actual Berlin Wall and the metaphor of bourgeois disapproval. Moore's Hedwig means business. "There isn't much difference between a bridge and a wall/ Without me right in the middle babe/you would be nothing at all"

The songs are great. *Rolling Stone* magazine wrote at the time- here was a rock musical with actual rock music. Nothing lights the touchpaper like "Angry Inch" narrating the ghastly events of a gender transition operation going horribly wrong. Hence the song's title – the tiny grim, fleshly reminder of so much lost and so little gained. Crowd favourite, Moore is not alone in bringing this weird, ambitious, crazy-brave and heroic story of resistance into the light.

As Hedwig's devoted, but despised, paramour Yitzhak, Adam Noviello is a thin, desperate, introverted foil to the petulant extravagance of Moore, with a vocal range and presence that lifts the music literally to another level.

Crucial also to the success of this production is the band . Versatile guitarist Glenn Moorhouse, bassist Felicity Freeman, Jarrad Payne on drums – all under the exacting direction of Victoria Falconer on keyboards, and momentarily, a quivering theremin.

Hedwig's narrative aaarrk, from bad to worse to even worser, is contrasted with the success and glory gathered by their protégé Tommy Gnosis – plagiarist and traitor to their universe of two. While Hedwig and The Inch are playing two-bit dives, the mysterious door is momentarily opened in a blizzard of stage haze to reveal Tommy playing Hedwig's compositions to stadium crowds.

Seann Miley Moore has a large task capturing the many elements of this ambitious, thematically complex stage work. The East Berlin satire is perhaps too esoteric for present audiences and Moore's German accent is not brisk enough for the political wit.

But armed with Stephen Trask's brilliantly varied songs – from the melancholy of "Wig in A Box", the country lilt of "Sugar Daddy", and the alienated numbness of "Wicked Little Town", Moore, Noviello and the lock-step band, have the audience entranced, energised and agog for every angry and exalted inch of Hedwig's tour of the lower depths.

See it before it leaves town. It is a 27 year queer classic.

Presented by GWB Entertainment. Andrew Henry Presents & Adelaide Festival, Hedwig and the Angry Inch is playing at The Queen's Theatre until March 15.

Adelaide Festival: Theatre Krapp's Last Tape

Published: 2025-03-01 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

In a meticulously staged production of a Samuel Beckett classic, Irish actor Stephen Rea gives a touchingly human account of a man in old age slowly revisiting and rewinding a life of disenchantment and missed opportunities.

Written by Murray Bramwell

“A country road. A tree. Evening.” In 1949, Samuel Beckett transformed the post-war theatre with a single play –*Waiting for Godot*. Clearing the decks of stage naturalism and psychologically detailed characters, he opted for theatrical minimalism. Less was never more than with Beckett. The busy-ness of the bourgeois stage – all that talking and moving about - was replaced with monosyllables and stillness. Instead of glib answers there were only questions. Will we ever know enough to complete the picture ? Will Mr Godot come tomorrow ?

Beckett’s third play, written in 1958, is differently stark. “A late evening in the future. Krapp’s den” – What new Hell is this going to be ? *Krapp’s Last Tape* uses an ingenious, but completely plausible, device to examine the idea of memory as being both truthful and deceptive.

For 55 minutes, a 69 year old man listens to a series of tape recordings he has made of his thoughts and feelings when he was 39. And that 39 year old also ponders the life of his younger self again, back even to glimpses and fragments of childhood.

For the old man these are not recollections in tranquility. Instead they are rebukes and painful reminders of lost opportunities, false hope, and fading, irretrievable time.

In this Landmark Productions version, just opened in the Dunstan Playhouse as part of the Adelaide Festival, prominent UK director Vicky Featherstone has opted for an interesting and unexpected restraint in her approach.

Beckett’s stage instructions are minimal, but they have, over time, led to conventions such as surrounding Krapp with, well … crap. Settings looking like a hoarder’s paradise. The rag and bone shop of the heart. A ruined man in his ruined den.

Instead, set designer Jamie Vartan has located Krapp in sparse surroundings. A simple bare table (with an interminably long drawer to prolong the banana gags) located on a raised platform, a single lamp suspended above, and a ramp leading to an unseen room behind. It is from there that Krapp industriously fetches piles of tape boxes and sneaks a slurp from the noisily uncorked bottle he has stashed away.

Paul Keogan’s lighting vividly etches the central action, gently mocking perhaps, the false protestations of illumination from Krapp version 2.0 . Costume designer, Katie Davenport keeps faithful to Beckett’s prescription – the black narrow trousers, crumpled white shirt, capacious sleeveless waistcoat, and bodgie white boots that thud across the stage when he exits.

These details remind us of favourite inspirations for Beckett – the silent comedy of Buster Keaton and, in the case of *Godot*, the hat-swapping routines taken straight from Laurel and Hardy. We can see the playwright’s delight in the long, silent opening sequence when Krapp, in mesmerising slow motion, peels and eats one banana and then, after almost slipping on the peel, even more slowly eats another. It deliberately re-defines excruciation.

Many great actors have played the role of Krapp – Beckett deliberately exploits the dull thud in his name, by the way, as we also hear in the recurrent reports of our anti-hero’s bowel movements .

Beckett wrote the play with Irish actor Patrick Magee in mind - and he was imposing and irascible. Hume Cronyn was cranky, John Hurt distraught and crestfallen, and Max Wall, the music hall comic, capered with the word ‘spool’ with particular delectation.

Irish actor Stephen Rea, guided by Vicky Featherstone, is a more contemplative character. The fulminations and table thumping are more muted – even when he sends a stack of tapes flying. He is not dishevelled, grimy and unshaven, his thick dark, curly hair is not standing out in anguished spikes. Even his faculties are more intact. He is mildly deaf, but doesn’t shout, he can’t see, but doesn’t peer extravagantly, he doesn’t walk with a geriatric stoop. This Krapp is in surprisingly good nick.

It means the play has less angry angst and more mordant musing. Rea is still haunted by past failures and missed chances, especially in love. Hunched over his Grundig, he repeatedly pores over that section in Box 3, Spool 5, where his girlfriend dismisses their relationship without even opening her eyes. But his response is not demented, or laced with misogyny. It is rueful and profoundly sad.

There are great pleasures in Stephen Rea’s measured delivery, and the fact (on the off-chance that he might sometime get to play the role) he had actually recorded the taped sections of the play some twelve years before this performance, is a terrific bonus.

But this production steps short of countenancing the “sour cud and the iron stool.” Maybe 69 is the new 47. Perhaps the terrors of aging, decrepitude, amnesia, and impotent rage can be postponed for a while. And maybe it is still a legitimate crisis to be very disappointed and glum.

Krapp’s Last Tape is playing and unspooling at the Dunstan Playhouse until March 8.

Published in InDaily InReview, 1 March, 2025.

Adelaide Festival: Camille O'Sullivan's Loveletter

Published: 2025-03-05 *Adelaide Festival · Music*

Adelaide Festival: Music

Camille O'Sullivan's *Loveletter* is an Irish toast to absent friends. Singers Sinead O'Connor and Shane MacGowan, along with David Bowie, are both mourned, and splendidly celebrated, in this mercurial musical tribute .

Written by Murray Bramwell

Arriving on stage in a flurry of waves, curtsies and glittery smiles, Camille O'Sullivan, from County Cork, surveys the audience at Her Majesty's with a flustered exuberance. She moves straight into a snippet of "Summer in Siam", a perky ditty by Pogues singer and composer, Shane MacGowan . After a few choruses it mashes-up into a more disturbed mood with Radiohead's "Street Spirit" ("I can feel death, can see its beady eyes.")

And already we are presented with all the restorative contradictions of an Irish wake.

Immediately, O'Sullivan introduces her keyboard accompanist Feargal Murray. He is the calm behind the storm, she notes, prefiguring her own excitable improvisations and comic digressions. She turns to the three tall daffy puppet props on the stage – two bemused cartoon cats and a bewildered dog, dressed in what might well be her costumes. She has decorated them with various trinkets. All drunken purchases, she says, that she made during COVID.

Dressed in a black, studded jacket, she spins around and bends over to show that the skirt no longer fits around the waist. "I don't look like my poster" she observes wryly – and the audience warms to her even more.

O'Sullivan reminisces about Sinead O'Connor. That she was ahead of her time; that many young girls found a voice because of her. And Camille herself was one. Of MacGowan, who struggled with illness and addiction for much of his life, she recalls spending his last days with him and his family, before leading into a haunting rendition of one his most poignant songs, "Broad Majestic Shannon"– "Take my hand forget your fears, babe/there's no pain, there's no more sorrow" –

"They were all gone, gone in a year," she sighs. Of MacGowan's funeral she recalls impishly– "The priests disapproved of us dancing near the coffin. But we had been so good for two hours."

With Feargal Murray, O'Sullivan sings the duet "Haunted", written in 1986 for the film *Sid and Nancy,* and re-released by MacGowan and O'Connor as a single in 1995. The lyrics carry heavier freight now – "I want to be haunted by your ghost/ By the ghost of your precious love."

O'Sullivan's vocal range and cabaret presence get a full workout with her highly theatrical rendering of Jacques Brel's "Amsterdam". Building from urgent whispers to a dervish-like increase in tempo and intensity, her voice roaring with rage and bitter despair, she collapses in a histrionic swoon. It is a show-stopping moment.

Nick Cave's "Jubilee Street" features some guitar feed and drum overdubs while the ever-versatile Murray moves from keyboard to trumpet. And to conclude the first set, O'Sullivan exchanges her gaffer-taped boots for spangled sandals and Kirstie McColl's witty teaser- "In These Shoes".

With a costume change to red overalls (her electrician outfit she calls it) Camille O'Sullivan returns to O'Connor with an unaccompanied reading of the heart-breaking classic,"My Darling Child". It is worthy of Sinead herself. And, with heavy piano chords and back up vocals from the ever-watchful Feargal, she delivers "Take Me To The Church" from O'Connor's final album, *I'm Not Bossy, I'm the Boss.*

David Bowie's death is another grief. She learned about his music from her older sister and sings the medley "Where Are We Now / Quicksand" with a pleasing hint of Ziggy's signature vocal inflection.

Drawing, seemingly randomly, from a range of material, O'Connor assembles a sequence that fits the mood she has created on the night, making the audience experience particular and unique. Her playful banter with the front rows, her zany chat and boundless energy, is endearingly eccentric . She jokes, confides, and even channels Mrs Doyle from *Father Ted*, but this mischief never detracts from the gravity and beauty of the music.

Sitting on the floor, as she likes to do, she switches to a short prose excerpt from James Joyce's *Dubliners* story "The Dead" and then, after a crowd singalong of Nick Cave's "The Ship Song", moves to Leonard Cohen's "Anthem" and rings the bells to let some different light in.

Finishing strongly in the final furlong with the McGowan masterpiece, "Rainy Night in Soho" and the evergreen 'Fairytale in New York "O'Sullivan and Murray conclude with Billy Joel's almost-mawkish "Lullaby".

And then, immediately, Camille O'Sullivan is off the stage -speeding to the foyer to meet, greet and mingle with a crowd in no hurry to leave. It has been that sort of night.

Camille O'Sullivan's *Loveletter* is playing one more night on March 5 at Her Majesty's Theatre.

Published in InDaily InReview March 5, 2025

Complete Works: Table Top Shakespeare

Published: 2025-03-10 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Adelaide Festival Theatre

Coriolanus, King John, Much Ado About Nothing

This complete rendering of Shakespeare, without actors and speeches, but instead storytellers with a cast of performers from the kitchen cupboard, not only intrigues us but shows us how an audience works.

Written by Murray Bramwell

Led by Tim Etchells, for 41 years the wryly-named Forced Entertainment company from Sheffield UK have made it their business to question and re-frame the business of theatre. Where other companies strive to replicate the world with intricate naturalistic décor and fourth wall acting, they have ruptured and altered audience perception. As one English commentator has observed- they confound conventions and explode expectations.

So when Forced Entertainment take on the task of presenting all 36 plays by William Shakespeare, we can be fairly sure it won't be with crowns and swords and beards, Elizabethan costumes, and a skull for Yorick.

Over eight days they are presenting summaries, synopses, descriptions and re-tellings of every play, each running between 45 to 75 minutes. But, unlike the Fringe productions that gabble through the entire canon in 65 minutes, or take a section of a single play for enhanced attention, Forced Entertainment are forcing us (in the nicest possible way) to think about how theatre itself works on our perceptions – especially the plays of the most revered playwright in the English language.

In a sectioned-off portion of the Space Theatre is small stage area with a wooden trestle table, a chair and two plastic tubs. At each side are two five-tiered racks crammed with hundreds of familiar domestic objects. It looks like someone has ransacked a street full of food pantries, laundry cupboards and medicine chests.

Behind all this is a large, rich red stage curtain, the familiar epitome of stage illusion- to be opened and closed in its peekaboo way. Except, here, its only purpose is to be out of place and remind us of what is not happening.

The first play is *Coriolanus*- not first in the printed canon, in fact it is the 31st. No chronologies or themed symmetries here; random order like shuffled cards. The performer, Jerry Killick, is selecting items from the shelves and carefully placing them on a small bench beside the table. It becomes apparent, that, like any stage director, he is selecting his cast, finding what best suits the role assigned.

Sitting at the table, Killick begins his commentary. It is low-key, informal, vernacular, droll, but always matter-of-fact. He is clearly absorbed by the story he is telling and intent on sharing the key components. We are effortlessly drawn in.

It begins with two generals, Titus Lartius and Cominius, and he illustrates this by placing what look like two Duracell batteries (the long-life ones) on to the bare table. They face each other as if talking. A delegation of plebeians arrive to complain that the population of Rome is being starved of wheat. They are represented by tiny wood screws, plastic boxes, and tatty cardboard packets.

Others enter the narrative. The devious Menenius is a rather kitsch silver candle holder, a messenger is a small pocket torch. Already we are looking for representations, metaphors or satiric meanings. When the central figure, Caius Marcus Coriolanus arrives, he is a large, battered pewter trophy cup with handles like jug ears. He towers over his subjects, or rather his objects – and he is the military champion of Rome . So now, is this some kind of a symbol ?

His domineering, Freudian nightmare mother, Volumnia is a metal plated coffee percolator who is placed thumpingly into the scene plotted out on the table - like war games, or a YouTube how-to-fix-it segment. Virgilia, Coriolanus' reticent wife, is a smaller, less imposing coffee plunger.

Killick's splendidly judged narration marshals all the threads of the plot with careful precision. A play we may know is becoming lucid in precis, but our eyes are always on the table. This has become a sort of daft puppetry, except it isn't simplistic, and it is certainly not trivial. The ambivalent portrait of Coriolanus is one of Shakespeare's great Roman tragedies and the more we watch, the more we become invested .

Will Coriolanus join forces with the Volscians leader, Aufidius (a large bottle of Ultra laundry liquid) and demolish Rome in revenge for his humiliating exile, or will he be put to death as a turncoat ? The crisis in the play has become real in the oddest way. As, for instance, in the slow march when the slain, now-horizontal trophy cup is solemnly carried on the shoulders of two aerosol containers (one of which is perhaps shaving cream).

This illusion in plain sight captures the paradoxes of theatre, and not just our willingness to suspend disbelief, but our determination to do so. None of us would have preferred Killick to stand alone and tell the story. It is the blocking, the chess moves, the interaction of seemingly banal objects, that brings an imagined story into perceptible truth.

Shakespeare said it himself – "O for a muse of fire, that would ascend/ the brightest heaven of invention". The table is the wooden O in the strangest Globe. And Forced Entertainment brilliantly persuade us that the isle is not only full of noises but meanings of our own making.

This project is marvellous in its wit and paradoxical theatricality. Far from being a waggish send-up, or a whimsy, the tragedy of Coriolanus can be told with a pewter cup and two coffee pots, as if they were actors at the RSC.

Also mention goes to Cathy Naden for her engrossing rendition of *King John* (performed by a potato masher) a play whose tedious intricacies defy synopsis. The bottle with the red stopper is the cardinal to the life, and the death of Arthur (a small well-meaning computer cable package ?) over the parapet is inexplicably memorable.

Interestingly, the comedies are more difficult to deliver. In Rich Lowden's *Much Ado About Nothing,* with Claudio as a small bottle of babycham, Beatrice, a pretty canister, and Benedick, a tinny of Bundaberg, the joke casting enhances the absurdity.

But in the play's more problematic moments, the villainous Don John is a suitably vinegary balsamic bottle; and the Judge, a dispenser of Saxa salt. It is very apt, when the cans go incognito to the masked ball, they are simply turned upside down.

Don't miss this unforced entertainment, and try and see more than one play - so that you can go beyond the initial novelty to, perhaps, unexpected imagining.

Complete Works: Table Top Shakespeare continues in the Space Theatre until March 16. See the website for performance dates and times.

Published in InDaily Review, March 11, 2025.

Cat Power

Published: 2025-03-15 *Adelaide Festival · Music*

Adelaide Festival

Music Cat Power Sings Dylan: The 1966 Royal Albert Hall Concert

The acclaimed Cat Power and a set of songs unparalleled in almost sixty years. What could be better? Unfortunately, among many musical highpoints, there are lows and hesitations, leaving both singer and audience frequently on edge.

Written by Murray Bramwell

If you want to hear Bob Dylan at his best, there couldn't be a better setlist than the Royal Albert Hall concert in 1966. Never mind that it was actually recorded in Manchester, it became the Faberge egg of bootleg vinyl back in the days before Napster changed everything. And it contained the infamous moment in the electric set when a disgruntled folk music fan yelled out "Judas."

Dylan's program was divided into two sections- an acoustic segment with just His Bobness plus guitar and harmonica. The second featured the soon to be legendary musicians known as The Band (on this Manchester night, minus Levon Helm). The songs, with just three exceptions, are from Dylan's most innovative albums of the middle 1960s -*Bringing It All Back Home, Highway 61 Revisited* and *Blonde on Blonde*.

It was an inspired idea for Cat Power aka Chan Marshall to record the bootleg material in its entirety. Her powerful, expressive voice is a match for the lyric density and singular phrasing of his compositions. Releasing the CD in November 2023, she has toured the show intermittently since.

Appearing onstage under sprays of spotlights, Marshall motions to dim them as low as possible. Accompanied on acoustic guitar and harmonica, she opens with 'She Belongs to Me' followed by 'Fourth Time Round'. Both sung slowly and reflectively, with guitarist Henry Munson watching her closely, coaxing her to stay in sync.

During the Dylan masterpiece 'Visions of Johanna' –'Ain't it just like the night/to play tricks when you trying to be so quiet' - Marshall bends the phrasing and becomes distracted, saying –'I don't know which song hurts me the most.' She has endured both physical and mental health problems over a number of years, including a catastrophic loss of vocal strength which threatened her career. But this seems to be a different kind of pain.

Over the rest of the set the tempo becomes more weary and anxious – 'Desolation Row', already arduously dirge-like in Dylan's version, is further diminished. 'Just like a Woman' is problematic, and 'Mr Tambourine Man', a song she clearly cherishes, has Munson manoeuvring to keep in rhythm while Marshall keeps referring to her music stand to keep track of the lyrics – as she does throughout most of the performance.

It is disconcerting set. As, according to online reports, they frequently are. There have been many lovely moments, the accompanists are excellent, the harmonica playing faithful to Dylan's breathy 'hands-free' technique. The audience is eager to applaud and encourage, even as we are anxiously wondering –'Are you OK ?'

The larger six-piece band assembles for the electric set that is famous for being infamous – despite the fact that Dylan had already traded in his folksinger incarnation eighteen months earlier. And, propelled by psychedelics and amphetamine, he created songs the like of which had never been heard before.

'Tell Me Momma' is first and the sound is colossal. It lifts the event and Chan Marshall also. She sways to the rhythm as gun guitarist Munson switches on the voltage, Jordan Summers plays cavernous chords on the Hammond B3, matched by Christopher Joyner on piano. and a lock-step rhythm section. As Dylan did in 1966, they play his early folk blues songs with the full apparatus of rock and roll – 'I Don't Believe You', 'Baby Let Me Follow You Down', and 'One Too Many Mornings'

Chan Marshall finds her Cat Power again with a driving rendition of 'Leopard Skin Pillbox Hat' and - an absolute highlight – 'Ballad of a Thin Man', Dylan's sneeringly contemptuous portrait of a suburban conformist now becomes a raucous blues rescue mission for the beleaguered Mr Jones.

Marshall then takes the mic to greet and thank an audience still signalling support and appreciation. And things unravel even more. She digresses and rambles and it is distressing to see her difficulty. She discloses and overshares, moving between regret and optimistic promises. The band looks on, unable to turn things around.

It is only when she announces the closer – 'Like a Rolling Stone' - that both band and singer can conclude as magnificently as they deserve. Marshall's singing regains strength and her tribute to the one of the most innovative and original songwriters of the 20th century can be seen for the achievement it is.

Published in slightly edited form in InDaily March 11, 2025.

Interview : Peter Sellars : Adelaide Festival.

Published: 2026-01-24 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre · Music*

Peter Sellars makes Adelaide Festival return: 'I hope I am coming back as an old friend'

Nearly a quarter century since his own tenure as Adelaide Festival artistic director was controversially cut short, Peter Sellars reflects on his onetime home and the timely body of work he is bringing to the 2026 festival.

Murray Bramwell

It has been 24 years since I last spoke to Peter Sellars and, at that time, both he and the Adelaide Festival were facing considerable trouble. The original 2002 program had collapsed as its ambitious community-based projects ran out of money, momentum, and management. An exception - fully vindicated by time- was *Shedding Light*, the visionary film commissioning project, producing such classics as *The Tracker, Beneath Clouds, Australian Rules* and others.

But Sellars had already resigned and a hastily cobbled, though in many ways intriguing, patch-up was announced. There was blood in the water by then, however, and the bewildered audience either stayed at home, or hightailed it to the Fringe.

The great sadness at that time –and even more now, as I reflect on it –was that there was never any opportunity to fully recognise and celebrate what a remarkable, accomplished, and original artist Peter Sellars is.

We had already seen, in Rob Brookman's 1992 festival, his masterwork, the opera, *Nixon in China*, the most celebrated of many brilliant collaborations with US composer John Adams (and Alice Goodman), including *The Death of Klinghofer, Dr Atomic,* and *The Gospel According to the Other Mary.*

Even with his earliest works while at Harvard, Sellars approached classic works with energetic invention – Handel's *Orlando* set in outer space, a *Mikado* in modern day Japan, and the Mozarts – *Cosi fan Tutti* in a diner in Cape Cod, *Don Giovanni* set in New York's Spanish Harlem, and *The Marriage of Figaro* (in 1988) located in an apartment in Trump Tower.

Other memorable works at that time included his inspired Handel oratorio *Theodora*, about a Christian martyr put to death (in his version, by lethal injection), and an intriguing recreation of Brecht and Weill's *Seven Deadly Sins.*

Since that time his career has continued to flourish and expand. He has collaborated with the late composer Kaija Saariaho whose opera, *Innocence,* was the highlight of last year's festival. Other Sellars productions include *Desdemona,* with novelist Toni Morrison and Malian singer Rokia Traore, a concert staging of *Pelleas and Melisande* with the Berlin Philharmonic, and *Flexn* featuring choreographer Reggie Gray and 21 flex Hip Hop dancers in New York City.

He has been artistic director of New Crowned Hope , a month-long festival in Vienna gathering artists from diverse backgrounds together to develop new works in celebration of Mozart's 250th birthday. In 2016 he was appointed musical director of the Ojai Music Festival in California celebrating its 70th anniversary.

Sellars is a Distinguished Professor at UCLA, a curator at Telluride Film Festival and has had residencies at English National Opera and the Berlin Philharmonic. He has gathered awards – the MacArthur Fellowship, the Erasmus Prize for contributions to European culture and - wait for it – The Lillian Gish Prize for "outstanding contribution to the beauty of the world and to mankind."

All these laurels, and he is still not resting. I spoke to him from Los Angeles a few days into the new year and he was already full speed ahead, setting up projects too hush hush to yet mention. Bristling with energy and always articulate, he is unchanged by the years.

He still wears his ceremonial beads and tightly buttoned shirts with sleeves down to the knuckles. His hair still stands in vertical spikes like antennae communing with the spheres, or maybe, touchpapers for a new cascade of creative pyrotechnics. His charm and fascination remain agreeably evident. Asked how he feels about returning to Adelaide his response is instant :

"It's a great thing and the works I am bringing are very good pieces so I am in a very good mood. There's a lot going on with Planet Earth at the moment but that's when the best art is most frequently made – in the most difficult times. As artists we have our job description in front of us. "

Sellars is bringing two works – *Perle Noire : Meditations for Josephine* and, returning with, what is now a chamber version of *El Nino Nativity Reconsidered*, his opera written with John Adams, which was performed as a work in progress in Adelaide in 2002.

"I am thrilled to be working with Julia Bullock," he beams. "I met her when she was a student at Juilliard. I had asked the head of the school's vocal department if I could meet some new singers because I felt I needed to replenish and work with the next generation. The next afternoon I met Julia and the bass baritone Davone Tines. It was an amazing day, incredible in fact. Julia started working straight away.

"She had made her debut with a solo recital in New York. It was a program of Medieval Spanish songs and Oliver Messiaen – and the second half was (jazz pianist) Billy Strayhorn and Josephine Baker. People went out of their minds. I wasn't there but a producer I work with rang me and said 'what are we going to do with this Josephine Baker piece ?' "

Originally from St Louis, Missouri, soprano Julia Bullock, at 39, has gathered plaudits from the New York Times and a Grammy for Best Classical Soloist. John Adams has called her his muse, and she featured in his operas, *Girls of the Golden West* and *Dr Atomic.*

"She is so self-directed," Sellars observes, "And in such powerful ways. She had the research ready to go. She wanted to make a whole evening around it. She spoke to the International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE – the good one !) and they recommended the composer Tyshawn Sorey. He and I met. He is a great musician. Then he and Julia started making notes and Tyshawn began composing."

Asked if he was a matchmaker, Sellars smiles quietly and replies -"It's always a pleasure to bring people together and then the artists take it from there, and go to places only they can go."

The work was scheduled for the Ojai Festival before the score was completed. "It was a cold and late premiere "he recalls, "but a beautiful one. And then we really started working on it. Julia performed it in lots of places in America – Chicago, Houston, in cabarets and jazz clubs, but also on the grand marble staircase of the Metropolitan Museum of Art."

"And since then we keep working on it. Tyshawn keeps digging into it every night. Always asking for improvisation and interpretation. It has five musicians. Tyshawn on piano and percussion, then a flute, bassoon, saxophone and violin. They take it to such incredible places. Tyshawn creates these beautiful chordal wind ensembles. You are getting something like Kurt Weill or a Bach chorale. Then he has these gospel harmonies. It is very mysterious and beautiful music."

Perle Noire brings Josephine Baker back into recognition. A performer in Harlem she sailed to Paris in 1925 and became a sensation of the Jazz Age. In La Revue Negre and the Folies Bergere she experienced a freedom impossible in St Louis Missouri, or anywhere else in segregated Jim Crow America. And unlike the bleak life and times for "Lady Day" Billie Holliday, Baker enjoyed success and recognition. She was perhaps the Beyonce or Lady Gaga of the 1920s.

"We are reminded" Sellars notes, "that Josephine Baker was the best known and most financially successful black person in the world at that time. She knew exactly what she was doing and she did it. She had her dark moments because she was up against overwhelming odds, but she kept coming back.

"Late in her life she was evicted from her castle but at the same time was awarded a Legion of Honour for her services to the Resistance in World War II. She was the only woman standing next to Martin Luther King in the March on Washington. She was just an extraordinary person."

For the libretto Sellars invited in Jamaican American poet Claudia Rankine who provided "page after page" of drafts which were incorporated into the work. Sellars describes her as an "incredibly subtle, precise and clear-eyed poet."

"We have worked for ten years or so on this piece and it has evolved and the way the text is integrated does tend to change as Julia is feeling it. We are not re-creating Baker's performances. They are not an imitation of her. Instead we are presenting everything she herself, as a nightclub entertainer, was not able to do."

El Nino is also focused around Julia Bullock. She had performed the work in full operatic mode with the LA Philharmonic but, as Sellars explains, she wanted to perform it more and take it everywhere – not easy with a huge orchestra.

"She wrote directly to John Adams and said 'can I turn it into a chamber version so this piece can live on with many more performances ?' And John said - go ahead. This mini version that sits in the palm of your hand was created by Julia and her circle of friends. It has been circulating for about ten years. It has been regularly performed in New York in the Church of St John the Divine. After its Adelaide season *El Nino* will transfer to the Paris Opera for more performances. "

Peter Sellars hopes to spend extended time at the Festival catching up with friends and reconnecting to the city. "So much of my time in Adelaide was such a joy and I had some of the best times in my life there. I hope I am coming back as an old friend because I lived there for three years"

At the time we spoke, early in January, neither us I had any inkling that 2026 would be mired in controversy with the bungled collapse of Writers Week – a reminder that artists and their work can prove inconvenient and challenging. They uncomfortably remind us what is at stake and that the response can be hostile and recriminating.

"This is a time for working hard," Sellars observes. "Artists should work hard. But Art doesn't lecture anybody, it's an actual experience. It's not an argument, it's not ideology. It is ...taste this. There is no substitute for art because we say things that can't be said in any other way."

Perle Noire: Meditations for Josephine plays at Her Majesty's,

March 1,3-4.

Tyshawn Sorey: *Alone,* Her Majesty's, March 2.

El Nino Nativity Reconsidered, Adelaide Town Hall, March 12.

Published in slightly edited form on January 29, 2026. InReview.

Adelaide Fringe - The Debate Holden Street Theatres

Published: 2026-02-19 *Adelaide Fringe · Theatre*

Fearing her daughter won't make captain of the school debating team an overzealous mother turns to drastic tactics to win the argument.

Murray Bramwell

Is there anything Martha Lott doesn't do ? As well as hosting an outstanding range of Fringe shows at her Holden Street Theatres (check out the excellent *Bob Marley, How Reggae Changed the World* and *Eat the Rich)* she has written, and features in, her own new play, *The Debate.*

It is a sharp and timely little black comedy with some serious edge to it.

Sitting in the Principal's waiting room of prestigious high school are the ambitious tiger mother Mara and her mortified daughter Chloe.

It is about who should be captain of the school debating team – Chloe or another girl whose mother is also manoeuvring, with assistance (in the interests of diversity) from the school principal. Everything then escalates when Mara takes to Reddit for some serious cyber slander.

Unafraid of playing unsympathetic characters (who can forget the portrait of Martha in Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* ?) in *The Debate*, Lott's Mara has a backstory as a rowdy student who now has a career in the factional world of dirty tricks politicking. Mara is raucous, smart, confident and used to winning by any means. The extent to which she will go, is the nub and message of the play.

Crisply directed by Nick Fagan with lighting by Martin Smith, this production is well suited to The Arch. Martha Lott has written and captured a character who leads us down an ethical sinkhole.

Her unreliable narrative overwhelms the situation to strong theatrical effect. We find ourselves hostage to a runaway Karen. We see it all - from her grating broad accent, to her vengeful attitude to old rival Barry (now high profile in school governance), to her misplaced advocacy for an already capable daughter.

As Chloe, Amelia Lott-Watson convincingly captures the excruciation that Mara causes and provides a youthful moral compass in the absence of any in her hell-bent devious parent.

The Debate is a theatrically engaging petri dish of pettiness and spite, a mix of satire and uncomfortable reality where social media has become a weapon of mass disruption.

FOUR Stars

The Debate plays at The Arch at Holden Street Theatres until March 22.

Adelaide Fringe - The Soaking of Vera Shrimp

Published: 2026-02-20 *Adelaide Fringe · Theatre*

Vera Shrimp announces that there's going to be bits about science and bits about her. The combination is both fascinating and heartbreaking.

Murray Bramwell

You might say Vera Shrimp is a weather whisperer. She studies rainfall and its precipitation cycles and is a trove of information. She is fourteen and lives in Northern England, perhaps in Newcastle. She also has a special gift:

"I can feel the rain, the colours, the sensation, the words inside each drop when they land on my skin and seep inside me. So that means that everything is different now. I can make things alright again."

There is lot to fix. While watching television Vera's mother died suddenly from a brain aneurism. Her father was at the pub quiz and Vera was in her room. The death is the beginning of a drought and of the collapse of domestic order. Her father becomes virtually catatonic and Vera is left to manage the house and her increasingly erratic and besieged alienation at school.

Writer Alison Carr has woven a subtle, poignant and endearing narrative as Vera manages her overhead projections and earnest data in a painful effort to regain her absent father's attention and affection. The set adapted to the intimate space at Judy's at Holden Street is an eccentric but orderly study with shelves stacked with books, VHS tapes, weather maps and a tapestry of post-its highlighting some factoid or another.

Alex Howarth's fluid direction is enabled by the splendid solo performance by Martha Walker as Vera. Her fidgety movement, her bursts of delight in her tinkering science, the diligence of her notebooks, her distressingly lonely grief, the cruelty of her schoolmates, and the weird ecstasy of her mystic raindrops, are vividly evoked. The proximity of the actor to the audience further intensifies the experience.

The Soaking of Vera Shrimp is reminiscent of, and equal to, the excellent *Every Brilliant Thing* by Duncan Macmillan and Johnny Donahoe where a teenage boy is desperately trying to rescue his mother from suicidal despair by annotating the joys of life.

Vera Shrimp is on a similar mission and, in just sixty minutes, Martha Walker, in her school blazer and Peruvian wool hat, with her visual aids and cascading water displays, depicts an intriguing world – not captured in Blake's grain of sand, but in a droplet of wonder. This is a Fringe highlight.

FIVE STARS

'The Soaking of Vera Shrimp' is presented by Patch of Blue, Verse Unbound and Joanne Hartstone Presents, Commissioned by Archimedes Theatre Project, China. It plays at Judy's at Holden Street Theatres until March 22.

Adelaide Fringe - Dust The Mill

Published: 2026-02-22 *Adelaide Fringe · Theatre*

Dust is presented as one man's story, but it is a lively tribute to the endurance, courage, and solidarity of generations of British coal miners and their families.

Murray Bramwell

Dust is a glimpse, a distilled chronicle of the arduous, but also exuberant, lives of Northern English working men. A return to the UK for an elderly aunt's funeral in Yorkshire brought writer and director, Charlaina Thompson unexpectedly close to her family origins.

In particular, it was the exploits of her grandfather, a miner who was awarded the George Cross for rescuing a fellow worker during a mining accident in 1940, which led her deeper into the archives.

Then a chance meeting with actor Craig McArdle at an Adelaide Fringe show two years ago, revealed parallel family histories. His grandfather had also been a miner, who had narrowly avoided being killed in the Lofthouse Colliery disaster in 1973 which cost seven lives. For two years McArdle recorded his father's memories of growing up in those times.

For these reasons *Dust* has, not just a ring of truth, but is suffused with the vividness of first-hand memory. Tracing the life of one young man is both memorably specific and archetypal. It is also elegiac. The narration opens with a death rattle, the choking of ruined lungs filled with lethal dust. This is a man's life expiring, hostage to industrial mismanagement and cruelty.

Astutely guided by director Charlaina Thompson, Craig McArdle's presentation is remarkable for its wry comedy, nimble physicality, and rapid shifts in focus and mood. From the opening paroxysm, he transforms instantly into a young boxer - fit, full of swagger, and ready to take on the world. It is propelling theatre.

Conscription comes suddenly, a burden falling more heavily on working class men. Barely eighteen, he is on his way to Korea – for a war "fought over a line on the map." Our man returns alive, but his pal Dave does not.

Back in England he gets work as a boilermaker and meets his wife, Dot. McArdle's enactment of the courtship has a gentle charm, interspersed with banter, comic impersonations and music hall serenades..

When he loses employment, he has five mouths to feed and the mine beckons as a bleak and dangerous option. These are the grimmest sections of this picaresque narrative. But also leavened by the camaraderie of the workers, and the adherence to the "Northern Ten Commandments" – especially number ten– "Thou shalt not leave anyone behind".

The account of the lethal inundation of the Lofthouse Colliery mine - when a wall broke through from an adjacent, abandoned Victorian-era excavation - is piteously described. McArdle is also at his best capturing the anger and despair at the failure of later industrial strikes, and then the end days of Thatcher era closures.

Charlaina Thompson and Craig McArdle have retrieved history and dramatized it with econ-omy and conviction*. Dust* is theatre that restores memory, rescuing it from obliteration.

FOUR stars

Dust, presented by Yellow Brick Theatre Company, is playing at The Mill, 154 Angas Street, until March 7.

It is WOMADelaide Time Again

Published: 2026-02-25 *WOMADelaide · Music*

Director Ian Scobie and Associate Director Annette Tripodi, unveil some of the logistics and highlights (including their favourites) in the program for WOMADelaide 2026

Murray Bramwell

It is three weeks out from opening night for WOMADelaide 2026 and Ian Scobie is quietly confident. "It's always touch wood" – his familiar caveat. But he is noting the positives. "We got the crazy heatwave out of the way. And we don't have huge travel logistical challenges. No cranes and feathers. It's looking relatively straightforward. "

Then a pause, and he adds: "Nothing has been straightforward since COVID and everything changes. This year we have had some supply problems with companies running into financial difficulties. Colleagues in other fields comment similarly. On a project of this scale, there are a lot of people involved and a lot of contracts. So a lot of things can go awry. It is a more difficult time with artist commitment than even four years ago

"Since COVID, and two recent hot weather events, our single day tickets are behind in sales because people are sitting back and waiting to see what the weather will be like. It is not a huge difference but it is a noticeable shift. The three and four day passes have been snapped up and people have really taken up the instalment payment system – an acknowledgment of the cost pressures on daily budgets. It's a complex beast but I'm feeling pretty good."

This is Ian Scobie's 29th WOMADelaide festival – next year will be the 30th and the 35 year milestone. From inception he has overseen one of the few continuous success stories in Australia and overseas. By contrast, WOMAD in the UK took "a post-COVID knock", WOMAD Aotearoa/NZ is having a year off with a very challenged national economy, and other European WOMAD events – in Spain, Chile, and elsewhere - are also in abeyance. After WOMADelaide there will be just one modest event in Glasgow before WOMAD in the UK re-launches at a new venue in July..

"This event couldn't happen in Adelaide without the support we get from the Government," Scobie is quick to add. "There are no two ways about it. It is like the Adelaide Festival. It is a significantly supported event and that allows us to put together a program which is quite different from WOMAD in the UK where it has only some local council support, otherwise it depends on box office.

"Since day one we have had funding from Australian Major Events (now Events SA) and it has succeeded. 40% of the audience comes from outside Adelaide- so it is an economic driver and justifies support. It is great that we have Government commitment to continue to 2029. This might involve some changes but the brief remains the same: the presentation of work from around the world that has that element of discovery and surprise for audiences."

Associate Director Annette Tripodi, who began as a volunteer at the WOMADelaide 1997 festival has for many years now, in partnership with Scobie, assembled the four day and night programs. So how does this one compare ?

"Every year is a different adventure – artist wise- but we usually program between 65 and 75 groups and we have about 70 this time. The spread of 38 countries is similar to previous years and more than 650 artists are taking part. The layout remains the same with seven stages ranging from the large Foundation Stage to the Moreton Bay and Zoo Stages, and others including the relatively new Academy Stage.

"This will showcase 25 eighteen to thirty year olds throughout the festival. The whole idea of the Academy (a project in partnership with the Northern Sound System) is to provide a platform for emerging First Nations and culturally diverse talent. The idea began many years ago but came to fruition in 2020 and the first performances were at our COVID-modified 2021 event in King Rodney Park. Successful graduates include Kenyan-born Elsy Wameyo, who has since toured the UK and Europe. It has been gorgeous to see this talented, driven, focused young woman has gone to the next level.

"In the festival's wider First Nations program it is wonderful to have Yothu Yindi back. They first played in 1993 - quite a different time in their career trajectory. Now, some original members, alongside their children, nephews, and grandchildren, are carrying the legacy. They have so many great songs and I think everyone is hungry to see them again.

"BARKAA is also playing on Saturday night. She first performed two years ago and since then has become possibly the country's biggest female First Nations performer. She is bringing a live band, a DJ and a much larger catalogue of songs. Each day in our indoor theatre space, The Studio, Lewis Major Projects contemporary dance will perform their stunning show *Triptych REDUX* and ARIA award winner, Baker Boy will perform his new album *Djandjay* on Saturday night.

A highlight, singled out by both directors, is 80 year old Kankawa Nagarra. A Walmatjarri Elder, she has toured internationally with Hugh Jackman and in 2024 won the 20th Australian Music Prize for her album *Wirlmarni.* Annette recounts her legend –"a folk blues, gospel singer and storyteller who didn't own a guitar until in her 40s." Ian Scobie also enthuses about her amazing career. "She is the heart and soul of Indigenous Australia – and of remote Australia as well."

Also on the directors' favourite list is Troy Cassar-Daley, who they saw recently at the Adelaide Guitar Festival. Scobie describes him as a stalwart of the Australian scene – "a warm performer and great storyteller. And having him perform with a string quartet (led by Emily Tulloch from Zephyr Quartet) I think will be a beautiful combination "

I asked Annette Tripodi how the lineup assembles itself and how headliners emerge. "The sheer volume and diversity of the artists put forward to us is unpredictable – in a good way.

We have a wish-list of artists but various things can prevent their availability to come to Australia in March; say, the recording of a new album, or some other unanticipated delay, but then later they come through. And sometimes those who come in, as ideas, quite late in our planning are a perfect fit. So it's an instinctive process. You can feel very strongly about a certain group being the bedrock, the foundation of the festival, and then start to see what works well with that.

"For example, at WOMAD in the UK, the Zawose Queens were such a stand-out – particularly their two lead singers. Their energy and electricity made us want that to happen in Adelaide, to be part of the picture. It wasn't possible for our 2025 festival, but it was for this year. It can't always go your way and the feedback I've had over the past year from other festivals is that everything is taking longer to lock into place. I can testify to that !"

Looking across the top names, Tripodi notes – "Having Malian singer Oumou Sangare return as a headliner for International Women's Day on Sunday was something we wanted to pursue really early on. Alogte Oho and His Sounds of Joy make the most exhilarating music. I think it is going to set the tone for whole weekend. It is an unusual mix of the familiar sounds of Ghana with North Ghanaian gospel music. They are electric on stage and will do their second show on Monday, nicely bookending the festival.

"We also have our very first Italian headliner. We have programmed many wonderful performers from Italy but no-one that has traversed as many musical styles as Jovanotti. Over a forty year career he has built a huge following – he played 54 sold out arena shows in Italy last year. He's very pleased to be doing his first WOMAD. It's a big one for opening night."

And then there is Grace Jones. " I have to draw attention to the biggest act. The inimitable Grace Jones headlining Saturday night is an absolute coup. Not only because it was our fourth attempt to make it happen, but because she has so many great songs, and a dazzling live show that's a sight to behold. "

Some of the most memorable performances at WOMADelaide have been the quieter, meditative ones. The sets from the Qawwali vocal group led by Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan and the Indian violin ragas from Dr L Subramaniam are part of WOMAD legend. More recently Nils Frahm and Anoushka Shankar have played into the midnight hour.

This time, Indian duo Balaganesan and Bageswari will play their nadaswaram reed wind instruments on Friday and Monday while The Necks, famed improvisational Australian jazz trio will captivate both familiar fans and new listeners on Friday night only.

In the packed program many acts stand out. International star Marlon Williams from Aotearoa/NZ will perform his 2025 album *Te Whare Tiwekaweka* entirely in Maori, Arrested Development return with their *Adult Contemporary Hip-Hop,* Irish folk unit Beoga perform having just come from extensive touring with Ed Sheeran, the post-folk troubadour, Iron and Wine, aka Sam Beam, will play a Friday night set, and Canadian hip-hop jazz crossover group, BADBADNOTGOOD will demonstrate their genre fluidity.

Others on Annette Tripodi's list include Cretan dynastic band Xylourides, Soul singer Jalen Ngonda, the Indian-American singer Ganavya, and also returning to Botanic Park, for the first time since 2014, Cuban rhythm king Roberto Fonseca.

And finally, one of her favourite – not-to-be-missed artists– returning after ten years : French performers, Orange Blossom, with their blend of bass, electronica and classical violin. Her verdict: "I saw them live again in 2024 and still find them thrilling."

Bringing the D for Dance in WOMAD will be the esteemed Belgian contemporary dance company led by Anna Teresa De Keersmaeker with Rosas-Rosas Danst Rosas, a work from 1983 performed possibly for the first time outdoors. Running for 90 minutes, Ian Scobie notes- "I am conscious it is a challenging piece. It will be a milestone for our audience."

The on-site roving theatre program will feature a residency by Melbourne's Born in a Taxi, and the zany Spanish hairdressers, Osadia. Aerial acrobatic-dance company, Chloe Loftus Dance, and trampolinists, Cie Hors Surface, with their *Weight of Cloud and HOME*, will keep our eyes on the sky.

Annette Tripodi observes, "The world is feeling quite upside down and mixed up at the moment and I think there are many incredible performers in the lineup who are going to bring joy and a very positive energy . It is one of the key reasons why WOMADelaide has survived and thrived for more than thirty years. It's our 'secret sauce'.

"What everyone feels in Botanic Park can't be easily duplicated. It is a sensation of letting go of your troubles and coming together with people you don't know, and you do know -to rejoice. And the thrill of discovery, moving from one stage to another, to see acts you've never heard of, being willing to be drawn in. It's a powerful connection for the audience – with the music, and each other. "

WOMADelaide plays at Botanic Park from 6-9 March, 2026.

The Cherry Orchard

Published: 2026-02-28 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Simon Stone moves his shrewdly faithful version of Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* to contemporary South Korea and the result is a rich mix of exuberant human foible, sadness, and manifest destiny.

Murray Bramwell

"What turned out isn't a drama" Anton Chekhov wrote to a friend in 1904, "but a comedy, in places even a farce…" He was referring to *The Cherry Orchard,* the last of his four great final plays, completed just before his untimely death later that year.

Chekhov has always puzzled and teased directors faced with staging his works. Stanislavsky, his important first explicator, designed a whole new approach to acting just to manage the psychological and sensory implications of his texts.

Over time Chekhov's plays, mischievously called by him - comedy in the case of *The Seagull* (which ended in a suicide), drama in reference to *Three Sisters,* and comedy again for *The Cherry Orchard,* still pose challenges*.*. For 120 years, interpretations have veered widely between tragedy and absurdism, comedy and pathos.

It is hardly a revelation to say that Chekhov contains all these multitudes. The task still remaining, though, is how to navigate these wild mood swings, the emotional and comic waxing and wanings which characterise human behaviour both in and out of extremis ?

Director Simon Stone in his splendid new production of *The Cherry Orchard* has surpassed his 2013 version for Melbourne Theatre Company by moving the play right out of the Anglosphere altogether.

"I developed this obsession with Korean actors" he explained to *InDaily* in an interview earlier this year. "Because they have this thing that is hard to achieve; they move so effortlessly between so-called 'serious acting' and 'comedic acting'. They'll find the gag and then they'll break your heart a second later – there's no announcement that the genre has changed."

Stone has long made a study of South Korean cinema – singling out *Parasite* as a particular inspiration. But in this production he has not only discovered the means of presentation, but he has delved the text for meanings outside pre-Revolutionary Russia.

The relocation of the play in contemporary South Korea and the entrenched, and increasingly decadent, *chaebol* dynastic families is inspirational. The chaebols – the name for wealth clans or financial cliques, controlled and tightly run by family dynasties imbued with social prestige and political prominence, comprise all but three of the top fifty Korean companies listed on their stock exchange.

They include familiar powerhouses – Daewoo, Samsung, Hyundai, LG - but over time for many, nepotism and cronyism has consolidated into corruption, complacency, unquestioned privilege and corporate decline.

So instead of Lyubov Ranevskaya and her daughter Anya returning from Moscow to their bankrupt family estate, Doyoung Song, and her daughter Haena, return from five years in the US to their modernist designer house in Seoul with its adjacent cherry plantation.

The dilettante Russian brother, Gaev has become Jaeyoung Song, and Lopahkin, the son of a serf who becomes a prosperous merchant is, in the Korean equivalent, Doosik Hwang, a wealthy investor in new tech and other thriving start-ups, with an urgent recovery business plan which falls on deaf and obstinate ears.

With his own script, written in English and then translated into Korean, Simon Stone has more than adapted Chekhov, he has re-ignited his text with innovation and an assurance and aptness that is exceptional. The often used term "re-imagining" - to describe half-baked cliché and theatrical plunder - has no place here. I hope, somewhere, Chekhov is smiling.

On stage at the Festival Theatre, opening the 2026 Adelaide Festival, Stone's production is formidable. Only last year we were astonished by his production of the late Kaija Saariaho's opera *Innocence,* with its towering set design by Chloe Lamford.

Here, subtly lit by James Farncombe, in all-encompassing pastel washes, set designer Saul Kim has built a glass and steel framed ziggurat through which we view the kitchen and lounge where the extended family and hangers-on gather – boasting, belittling, laughing, snarling, reconciling, weeping, drinking, shouting, and frequently- falling down in stupor.

The set has a mezzanine for bedroom scenes, a high peak for "message from the mountain top" speeches, and on one side the roof is a huge, descending staircase as if to amplify rapid descents into torpor and exaggerated despair.

The performances from the ten-person ensemble - in Korean, with Stone's script as surtitles, are uniformly terrific.

And, because there are no small roles in Chekhov, every little bit helps. Sejun Lee as Yebin Shin, the shy chauffeur, also has a cameo as a gormless guitarist, serenading the absent Doona Jung (Chekhov's Dunyasha), vibrantly played by Heejung Park.

As the aloof and opportunistic underling, Joodong Lee (Chekhov's Yasha) Juwon Lee excels, and as a composite of the Russian spongers and sycophants, Byunghoon Yoo's Youngho Kim, perpetually sloppy drunk, and on the cadge for handouts, gives a glimpse of how the family fortunes have melted away.

Doyoung Song's two daughters, Hyunsook Kang and Haena Kang (Varya and Anya) are memorably played by Moon Choi and Jihye Lee. The complex, often dissonant relationship they have with their careless, self-preoccupied, alcoholic mother is poignantly captured in Stone's text, as are their often-vexed love interests. The theatre program has a haywire diagram of the various enmeshed connections of the heart in the play. As in all Chekhov – everyone is in love, but invariably mismatched, thwarted or unrequited.

In the case of Doyoung's ineffective brother, Jaeyoung, (Chekhov's Gaev) Stone turns up the satire on privileged incompetence. Sangkyu Son is excruciating in his rejection of reports of the dire financial state of the corporation, and arrogantly rejects any remedies. His manic, regressive panegyric to his childhood record player is both funny and disturbingly hysterical.

And, as for the leads - Korean screen favourite Doyeon Jeon as Doyoung Song and Haesoo Park (of *Squid Game* fame) as Doosik Hwang (Chekhov's Lopahkin) - they are the fulcrum of the play.

Jeon's portrait of an other-worldly, habitually entitled woman is a perfect instance of the serious and the comedic. When she has a vision in the darkened cherry grove of her dead son Haejun (which turns out to be the former tutor and perpetual student of life, Donglim Byum, energetically played by Yunho Nam) we understand the tragedy underlying her giddy, restless search for distraction.

Her renewed contact with Doosik Hwang very early in the play establishes an important thread. Doosik, the son of the drunken chauffeur dismissed by the family long ago, has made good and is eager to thank Doyoung for a long-forgotten kindness in his otherwise miserable childhood. In her careless way she has no recollection of him, and when he proposes a rescue for the foundering chaebol, she resorts, along with her brother, to frivolous rejection- "You are ruining my party."

Doosik is a well-intentioned man, whose only real friend in the play is the diametrically opposed but cordial Donglim. When Hyunsook farewells him she says "you have a soft soul, do not let it harden." But momentarily it does when Doosik, leveraged to the hilt, buys out the corporation and announces – "I bought your future and your past" reminding the family that he now even owns their name. He is here to help but wants payback for the family's pompously blithe dismissal as well.

The final scene of the closing-up of the house, in readiness for demolition, is both true to Chekhov and a measure of Simon Stone's bold theatrics. As the last suitcases are collected there is a ruthless surge of activity from Joodong Lee and Doona Jung, armed with leaf blowers clearing the stage (of what looks like potting mix) in an impatient blizzard of contemptuous despatch.

Youngkyu Jang's music, gently ambient at the play's opening, closes in a terrifying cacophony of engine noise. Someone in a hard hat with a megaphone barks – "It is time for a new age. It starts today."

It was bad before. Now there is worse to come.

The Cherry Orchard plays at the Festival Theatre until March 1.

Perle Noire: Meditations For Josephine

Published: 2026-03-02 *Adelaide Festival · Music*

Adelaide Festival - Music Theatre

This imaginative song cycle uses jazz, poetry and sublime singing to remind us urgently that the injustices of the past are not yet over.

Murray Bramwell

The more time passes, the more extraordinary Josephine Baker becomes. Born in St Louis, Missouri in 1906, she moved to Paris at the age of nineteen and was star of the Folies Bergere by 21. As her popularity and celebrity expanded in France she broke all barriers.

At her peak, she was not only the highest paid woman performer, and the highest paid black performer, but the highest paid performer in the known world. Comparisons now, might be with Beyonce or Lady Gaga. All of this, happening far from the Jim Crow segregation and persecution in the United States.

Baker became a French citizen and was awarded the Medal of Honour by President de Gaulle for her valour in World War II. Back in the US, she gained prominence when she walked with Martin Luther King in the March on Washington in 1963. Extraordinary accomplishments for a young woman famous for dancing in a costume consisting of artificial bananas.

It is all these aspects of her life which are the driving force behind *Perle Noire : Meditations for Josephine,* a project begun in 2016 by director Peter Sellars, recent Juilliard graduates Julia Bullock and Tyshawn Sorey and poet, Claudia Rankine.

But this powerful one movement song cycle is not a biography of Baker. Nor does it exalt her rise to fame, or construct a chronological narrative of rising and falling fortunes. Instead it is an operatic fantasia imagining, and often castigating, the paradoxes and turmoil of a success based on being exoticised, eroticised, and objectified.

As Claudia Rankine writes in one of her vivid poems in Baker's voice –'I understand that I am a package/ that's been ripped open and devoured / like a box of chocolates."

Perle Noire explores Baker's uncertain self-image and personal doubt. But more significantly it highlights and dramatizes her implacable resistance and anger towards racism and injustice.

Boldly lit by James F. Ingalls, a staircase leading to a raised platform divides the stage at Her Majesty's. On each side are the musicians from the International Contemporary Ensemble. Composer and musical director Tyshawn Sorey is on stage left with his piano, drum kit, percussion and a thunderous gong.

Violinist Jennifer Curtis is beside him while guitarist Dan Lippel is seated at the stage edge. On the other half are more musicians. Flautist Alice Teyssier, Rebekah Laplante on bassoon and Travis Laplante on saxophone.

Claudia Rankine's poetic monologues – some of which appear in the program - establish the tone, style and purpose of the production when she channels Josephine Baker :

> "On stage the body they saw / didn't have me in it./ Is emptiness a thing to behold ?/ I try to contain it with costumes/ I turn my skin into a costume. /I walk on to the dark stage/ and they say my nakedness shimmers savage/"

Meditations like this are powerfully enunciated by soprano Julia Bullock who maintains a commanding presence for the full 110 minutes of the performance. Significantly she is neither an impersonator nor a bystander. Instead, she is Josephine Baker's guardian and advocate.

The events and principles, the racial transgressions and disgrace, are personal and political for Julia Bullock and this commitment, as in all of director Peter Sellars' works, is key to the impact and integrity of the production.

The opening song "Bye Bye Blackbird", the jazz standard by Mort Dixon and Ray Henderson, has been completely and brilliantly dismantled by Tyshawn Sorey and his fellow musicians. Bullock in splendid voice repeats the word "Blackbird" while Sorey plays his flawless cascading piano, joined by the flute, then the bassoon in gravelly mode, while the saxophone adds a welcome lyrical promise. It is only near the end that "Bye Bye" appears – more cryptic than familiar.

"Sous le Ciel Afrique" (Under African Skies) offers a homeland idyll in contrast – again featuring celebratory sax and crooning bassoon while Bullock sits on the stairs bathed in red light.

Other songs mark the shifting moods and polemics of the cycle. "Si J'etais Blanche" (If I were White) examines race and identity while "C'est Lui" is a glimpse into the lousy men in Baker's more torrid and unhappy private life.

There are upbeat contrasts when Bullock spins and twirls - choreographed by Michael Schumacher with silhouette effects from Ingalls' lighting. "Madiana" captures the festive eclecticism of 1920's dance music and the lullaby "Doudou" celebrates Baker's devotion to her huge clan of adopted children.

"Terre Seche" (The Dry Land) is a slow ballad of duress and exhaustion, Bullock in mournful voice and the musicians providing funereal obsequies to the prone singer at centre stage.

But it is "My Father How Long", a spiritual from the 1867 anthology of Slave Songs of the United States which concludes this intriguing, inventive and beautifully presented chamber work. A prayer for rescue and salvation from nearly 160 years ago still speaks to the present with grim relevance.

"How long will our people suffer ?" it asks, "When will there be happiness on Earth?" That final line brings an audible gasp (and a shout) from the audience before the applause.

Director Peter Sellars, writer Claudia Rankine, the brilliant Julia Bullock, gifted composer and improviser, Tyshawn Sorey and the excellent International Contemporary Ensemble have not only produced a series of meditations for a great African American woman, they have expressed the urgency, disappointment, and anger at the racial injustice of present times. Not only in the United States, but for those of us in this Adelaide audience, much closer to home as well.

Perle Noire: Meditations for Josephine plays at Her Majesty's until March 4

Mary Said What She Said

Published: 2026-03-07 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Adelaide Festival - Theatre

Isabelle Huppert is superb as Mary Queen of Scots in an unorthodox monologue that explores the woman who would be queen. And Adelaide finally has a chance to see the theatrical vision of Robert Wilson.

Murray Bramwell

Much is known about the last 24 hours in the life of Mary Queen of Scots before her execution at 8am on February 8, 1587. Her night prayers with household servants, were documented, as were her farewell letters (including to King Henri III of France), and poignant details such as settling wages for her servants and choosing the clothing she would wear.

Her black gown, removed to reveal a red petticoat, symbolising her martyrdom to Catholicism, caused consternation when she was prepared for the block. There were many reports of the event – perhaps because so many saw it. Three hundred people in the Great Hall witnessed her steady calm, her courage, and her declaration of Catholic faith in English and Latin.

She forgave her enemies, and the executioner -even though he was to botch the beheading. Witnesses also testified that her small Skye terrier dog emerged from under her garments after her death.

As the title - *Mary Said What She Said*, suggests, writer Darryl Pinckney is giving her, not just a voice, but the uncontested floor, to tell her story -from becoming Queen of Scotland at six days old, to becoming Queen Consort of France, to the treachery of her demise.

We learn of her tragic and ill-advised marriages. First to Francis II, King of France (who died a year later from an ear infection), then to Henry Stuart (Lord Darnley), her half-cousin, who died suspiciously in an explosion at his house, and, finally, to the 4th Earl of Bothwell, a complete rotter, suspected of Darnley's murder, who so scandalised Scottish nobility that Mary was imprisoned and Bothwell exiled.

Then, after abdicating to her son, she seeks refuge in England with her cousin Elizabeth I - only to be further betrayed and imprisoned for the last eighteen years of her life.

Pinckney's text, in 86 paragraphs, circumnavigates her 44 years with a zigzagging energy and urgency that is irrepressible. Combining fable, ballad, a witchy magic realism, and dark humour, it is digressive and indifferent to chronology. Mary says what she says in a dazzling way :

"Father of France , farewell. He died of a splinter in his eye. Death sneaked into his body's mighty fortress like a bird come over a rampart, a little thing not singing. "

Of herself as bride she announces – "Once upon a time I was so white the poets went mad. I was white, white and smooth and flawless. They went mad, I was so fair. They couldn't believe it. They said so."

Elsewhere she says, almost as incantation- "Because men love me and have always loved me, hateful women think me a witch. Let them know there is delicacy in my witchcraft. Men take me for their cause. I am the silk."

She mockingly describes Elizabeth I :

"She who holds the stick owns the cow. But I lead this dance. London plans a revel for my severed head. Let no one lie about how well I did. Let Mary's face be full of grace. Mary has a son .The painted virgin leaves no trace. "

The son became James I of England and Scotland. Mary prophesies - "My end is my beginning. "

More tenderly, she coos to her maidservants – the four Marys who remain faithful in spirit to the end.

"So it was before this, but I like to think of them as around, and so you are around my Marys, even you miserable Mary Fleming. You are here with Mary Beton, singing and choosing my jewels and the two of you with Mary Livingstone, at embroidery and ready to laugh, and the three of you have gone to find my dear Mary Seton, who loves me best, and always has."

Legendary director Robert Wilson (who lamentably died in July last year) has created another masterful *mise en scene* for the text he commissioned from Pinckney for the renowned French actor, Isabelle Huppert. Wilson worked with both of them previously on *Orlando*, adapted from the novel by Virginia Woolf.

Wilson's theatre is both vast and minimal. It is the antithesis of naturalism and psychological realism, but is revelation nonetheless. Flooding the Festival Theatre stage with a pale bluish light on a large screen with two lines of white strip lights running along the floor, Wilson establishes his canvas. And though never literal, it has a meteorological effect as the washes of light become overcast and turbid, emphasised by stage smoke effects and shadow.

Huppert, looking amazing in Jacques Reynard's extraordinary gown – a black sequined bodice with puff shoulders, a black neck piece with white ruffle, nipped in at the waist and then surging to the floor – is in complete silhouette. Like so much of Wilson's set and light design, it is simply perfect.

As we are looking at this spectacle, composer Ludovico Einaudi's score is filling the space with rich (but never sentimental) strings and basslines. It has a driving tempo that will intensify later in the performance, using overpowering repetitions and rhythms that match Mary's agitated recollections, regrets and retributions.

From the moment Huppert speaks (in French) it is evident that this is not usual, measured, carefully inflected delivery. It is a chant, a spell, a torrent of feeling and outrage. It is a voice that has been kept demure and silent. Mary is now saying what she is going to say.

It is a remarkable performance. When Huppert sustains the pitch and speed, punctuated by frozen silent screams (and actual ones), it is reminiscent of Billie Whitelaw's solo performances of Samuel Beckett -especially the 1972 *Not I*.

Wilson has always encouraged unorthodox vocal delivery – whether the recitations of autistic poet Christopher Knowles performing "The Sundance Kid is Beautiful" or Wilson's own howls and groans, developed from voice exercises designed to control his stammer.

Similarly Huppert's movement is hieroglyphic – walking, gliding, parading in strict, almost OCD diagonal patterns, arms raised and hands fanned, fingers posed like a dancer's, shoulders swaying. It is mannered and intriguing, but never merely decorative. Wilson's choreography has captured social agitation, excitation, futility and agency since his earliest works from the 1970s. More than fifty years on, they still speak to the 21st century. And they work wonders for Huppert's portrait of Mary.

There is so much to glean from this production. Almost too much. Like Simon Stone's *The Cherry Orchard*, which was performed in Korean, this production depends on subtitles which are not well placed for some audience vantage points and contain a rapid volume of dense text that can distract, or restrict, our appreciation of the excellent staging and performance.

It is a great occasion to finally have a full production directed by Robert Wilson at an Adelaide Festival. His video work featured at the Art Gallery several years ago, but never a theatrical work such as this.

The blend of text, performance, and the director's unique staging, is a reminder that - even after half a century – his work still looks like the future. Mary said what she said – and so, brilliantly, did Robert.

Mary Said What She Said is playing at the Festival Theatre until March 8.

Adelaide Festival - Gatz

Published: 2026-03-14 *Adelaide Festival · Theatre*

Elevator Repair Company

Adelaide Festival

Theatre

Curiously and successfully blending narration with performance, *Gatz* brings an American classic into fresh perspective.

Murray Bramwell

As is often the case, the final weekend of the Adelaide Festival delivers up unexpected highlights - and *Gatz* is certainly one. We have been uplifted before by the Brooklyn-based Elevator Repair Company when they presented William Faulkner's *The Sound and The Fury* in 2010.

Taking the novel's first section, narrated by the mentally disabled mute, Benjy, in a torrential stream of tangled consciousness, the ensemble shared a verbatim reading of 62 pages of text that not only reminded audiences of Faulkner's masterful language, but exuberantly explored new theatrical possibilities.

This time with *Gatz* they have taken a whole novel. F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* which, despite celebrating its 100th birthday this year, is still American modernism at its sharpest and freshest.

A project which began in 1999 and premiered in 2006, it is now twenty years into a trajectory that, judging by opening night at Her Majesty's, is as assured and dramatically satisfying as ever.

We have had examples of marathon theatre in Adelaide over a long time – whether *Nicholas Nickleby,* Jan Fabre or Peter Brook's *The Mahabharata* in the 1980s, or more recently, works by Robert Lepage, Ivo Van Hove and Maria Abramovich.

Eight hours and thirty minutes is a trip to Singapore - but time flies with *Gatz*. Divided into four Acts, with a ninety minute dinner break and two twenty minute intervals, it amortises our attention and our appreciation splendidly.

Director and founder, John Collins and fellow creators describe the process leading to a presentation of *Gatsby* in its entirety:

"We knew we were interested in the writing, and not just the story, and we quickly found that the elegant efficiency of Fitgerald's style was irreparably injured when we tried to edit or condense…The prose is so delicately constructed that even the omission of a single adjective is rhythmically disappointing."

So, it was not surprising to go all out, especially in a world of E-books and downloads where every other person is either wired into podcasts or narrated fiction. But the Elevators are aiming higher, and more interestingly. They are mixing reading with performance in a way that alters both when in combination.

It is a variation, perhaps, of Bertolt Brecht's V-Effekt, where a performance is not so completely absorbing that there is no perspective. Misleadingly called alienation, it is better described as distancing, when we move in and out of the action, selecting and evaluating like a zoom lens.

The stage of Her Majesty's bears no resemblance to either Gatsby's palatial grandeur or the dystopic Valley of Ashes under the beady glare of Dr TJ Eckleburg. It looks like a ramshackle office. In fact, it closely resembles the scuzzy theatre upstairs space where Collins and lead actor Scott Shepherd and others first mooted the production.

In Louisa Thompson's set design (often lit in warm, autumnal tones by Mark Barton) there are racks of scruffy filing boxes, desks covered in folders, loose stationery, filofaxes, and computers of various vintages. The furniture is mish-mash mid-century, a spongy settee is midstage and three large fluoro tubes periodically flood the downstage area.

This is the location of the frame narrative. Nick Carraway, the unmotivated bond salesman, is sharing an office with secretaries and fellow workers who take phone calls, sign memos and generally push paper around. But he prefers to be hunched over his battered paperback copy of *Gatsby*, reading every word from "In my younger and more vulnerable years …" to "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past."

In this unchanging setting, the entire six hour-and-something story unfolds. Gatsby's extravagant parties, the intrigues, treacheries and recriminations between the beastly Tom Buchanan and his careless, unhappy wife Daisy, the miseries of George and Myrtle Wilson, the vulpine Wolfsheim (fixer of the 1919 World Series) and Nick Carraway's anaemic romance with golfing celeb Jordan Baker- all happen convincingly and vividly in this rag and bone shop of the heart.

The performances are excellent. As Nick Carraway, Scott Shepherd is central to the success of this production. Supplying every "Gatsby said suddenly" and "demanded Daisy insistently" - his reading is fluent and engaging, but also restrained and understated. He is servant to Fitzgerald's cadence and drollery. Sustaining the delivery for the entire performance and then lifting to a higher level for the conclusion is a tour de force.

The wicked wit, the dry understatement, the epigrams and satiric swipes are captured. But one limitation, perhaps, is that in holding the book (and operating as a sort of onstage director) he becomes omniscient and incontrovertible – and not the bedizened, unreliable observer of the ambiguous Gatsby preferred by literary critics.

The ensemble is terrific to watch. Especially since they depart so emphatically from, for instance, the influential film adaptations which have defined popular reception. In the case of the Robert Redford version, despite its many strengths, it ultimately steered the novel into a lavish, doomed, sentimental romance. And, in the Baz Luhrmann travesty, straight over a cliff into pointless triviality.

Lucy Taylor's Daisy is refreshingly direct. Still self-serving and irresponsible but real enough for Gatsby to be devoted to the point of calamity. She even affords opportunity for farce in the unexpected (but textually accurate) comic lift in Act Two when Gatsby, in his pink suit, clumsily woos her with near slapstick consequences .

As Tom, Gary Wilmes captures the lethal mix of privilege and brutality. Fitzgerald describes Tom's "cruel body" - and his penchant for racist supremacy is eerily current.

Laurena Allan and Frank Boyd, as George and Myrtle, bring a credible tragedy to a predicament which is both materially and emotionally bereft. Allan's Myrtle is less of a caricature and Boyd, doubling as the computer guy, gives George a perspective that is true to the novel when it could easily be caricatured.

Susie Sokol's Jordan, omnipresent in many of the scenes with Scott Shepherd's Nick, is an enigmatic observer. Sporty, odd, sometimes gawky in her leisurewear, she is given more than the usual Daisy sidekick role.

Others who feature include Gavin Price as Michaelis (and a variety of other small dialogue interactions). He has the most up to date laptop on his desk because, as sound engineer, he is toggling the effects and music including the ragtime strains of "The Love Nest " – "In the morning/ In the evening? Ain't we got fun."

Also, late in Act Four, is Terence Crawford as Gatz Senior, father of Jay come to grieve over his son's death. A boy he failed to understand, who created a whole legend to erase his wretched origins. Gatz reads from the Hopalong Cassidy book's flyleaf a list of Jay's resolutions and plans, his self-improvement schedule. Only too late does the parent draw pride in the future Gatsby supposedly had in front of him.

Key also to the success of this adaptation is Jim Fletcher as Gatsby. At first we see him as one of Carraway's fellow bondsmen but his presence as the enigmatic social chameleon is suitably calm and self-possessed. Fletcher, like so many others in this company of players has found a sufficiency in his performance that is in sync with the textual rhythm and never attempts to "act" over, or against it.

As Scott Shepherd delivers the last pages*,* he powerfully evokes Fitzgerald's portentous words :

"And as I sat there brooding on the old unknown world, I thought of Gatsby's wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy's dock. He had come a long way… and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him, somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night."

This exceptional project, *Gatz* reminds us of the range and ambition of a novel that is not only still engaging, but a century later, disturbingly prescient.

Gatz is playing at Her Majesty's until March 15.